

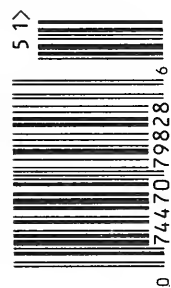
●●○○ *Four  
Quarters*

VOL. 9, NO's. 1 & 2  
Second Series

SPRING, 1995 Four Dollars



A Conversation with  
Madison Smartt Bell



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## Quarter Notes

JOHN ROONEY

### *Sunday Driver on the Information Highway*

Well I did it. I made up my mind and did it. The prospect of new roads to travel, exotic places to visit and interesting people to meet overcame my fear of making a complete fool of myself. I started a journey on the electronic network. And as I did it brought to mind an earlier time when an automobile ride was a similar combination of frustration and adventure. From our home in North Philadelphia, Dad would take us for a drive in the country, or through Fairmount Park, or maybe across the river to New Jersey. He rarely took the same route, but tried various side roads, and "short cuts" to satisfy his zest for seeing something new. I find myself doing the same thing on the Internet. Crank it up and soon I'm buzzing along taking in the sights.

At first I was limited to simple routines, and since I had never learned to type, I moved at a crawl. Oh well, when I first learned to drive, I drove around the block over and over again moving very slowly, exulting in my new skill. On the Internet I logged in, sent a brief e-mail to myself, saved it to a file, opened the file, read my letter, and logged out. As my confidence grew I typed the command "gopher" which I had been told could lead me in many directions. In response I was confronted with thirteen choices including *Surf the Net! (with Archie)*, *Dog-Eared Pages*, and *UNC Gopherspace*

(with *Jughead*). I could hear my Father's voice as he paused at an intersection, "this road looks interesting, let's see where it goes." I picked *Surf the Net!* and got nine more choices including *Master Gopher* at the University of Minnesota, *Other Gophers*, and *Search of Gopherspace* with *Veronica*. I remembered that Archie, Jughead, and Veronica were characters in a comic strip, and I knew that Minnesota's mascot was the gopher. I picked *Other Gophers*. Now the screen presented five choices: *Asia Pacific*, *European*, *Middle East*, *North America*, and *South America*. That seemed like enough "surfing the net" for my first trip through gopherspace. As I undertook more extensive journeys it reminded me of our longer family jaunts. Here we relieved the monotony of the trip by harmonizing on some old favorites like *Shine on Harvest Moon* and *Darktown Strutters Ball*, or by telling corny jokes. On the Internet I still can't pick up music, but exchanging jokes is one of the more popular diversions of Newsgroups. One currently making the rounds originated with a theology Newsgroup. Question: "What does an agnostic, dyslexic, insomniac do?"

Answer: "Stays awake all night wondering whether there is a dog." Of course, even with songs and jokes, our Sunday drives did not always go smoothly. There were detours and flat tires and traffic jams and potholes; my excursions on the Internet met similar hazards. Hitting the wrong key left me staring at "path not found," "bad command," or "connection terminated by foreign host." Worst of all was simply being stuck in the middle of nowhere,



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hitting various keys in an attempt to get moving or find a way of exiting. Even experts have trouble. A friend of mine who cut his teeth on computers sent along some newsletters that he wanted to share with me. Somehow he must have given a wrong command. Soon 50 copies of every edition came streaming into my files in the equivalent of the worst rush hour traffic jam I have ever seen.

Dad had two ideas for avoiding rush hour traffic. One was getting up at 5:00 AM (which we seldom did!); the other was to venture off onto back roads (which we often did!). "The long way round is the shortest way home" he would say triumphantly when it succeeded.

I experienced this same feeling after I found myself unable to get access to the Archie server at either Rutgers or Maryland because of heavy traffic. I typed in AU for Australia, where it was 3:00 AM, and quickly followed a route back to the Harvard Library where I wanted to browse a bit.

From my father I learned that when you don't know what you're doing, you can usually claim that you're just "exploring unknown territory"; but sometimes you have to admit you're just plain lost. Even when Dad finally accepted my Mother's advice and asked for directions, he couldn't come right out and admit he was lost. He would drive up to a house where people were sitting on the front porch and strike up a conversation. "Good morning...nice town you have here", and after a few minutes of small talk, he would casually mention that he was thinking of driving to Ocean City and

would like to hear their opinion of the best route to take. This might elicit something like : "Well, I'd go down Old Orchard Road here till you come to the Bottling Works, then turn left on Church Road. Follow that about five miles and you'll hit the Black Horse Pike." Dad would usually agree that he was thinking of going that way himself and drive off.

When I try this approach for my computer journey, I don't get much help, I get other questions. "What domain are you in?" "What prompt did you get?" "Are you using a C shell or a Korn shell?" If I knew the answers to those questions, I wouldn't be lost. Or feel so dumb.

In theory you can get help right from the computer itself just by typing the command for manual. Sure enough you get all the information you would ever want, and more. Written by a committee of engineers, lawyers and computer scientists, the answers to questions you haven't even thought of come flashing across your screen written in plain, ordinary everyday gibberish. The manual for telnet, a basic service on the Internet, begins with "telnet is used to connect to another host using the TELNET protocol. If telnet is invoked without arguments, it enters command mode, indicated by its prompt (telnet). In this mode, it accepts and executes the commands listed below. If telnet is invoked with arguments, it performs an open command with those arguments." Mmm, this reminds me of the directions for using a tire jack that came with my first car.



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A few paragraphs later it compares "character at a time" mode and "line by line" mode." In either mode, if the local chars toggle is TRUE (the default in line mode: see below), the user's quit and enter characters are trapped locally, and sent as TELNET protocol sequences to the remote side. There are options (see toggle autoflush and toggle autosynch below) which cause this action to flush subsequent output to the terminal (until the remote host acknowledges the TELNET sequence) and flush previous terminal input (in the case of quit and intr)."

Naturally, as you read the remaining pages of the manual it becomes even more entertaining. Almost as much fun as my parents attempting to decipher the symbols on the road map provided by our friendly Tydol Flying A dealer. "Isn't that blue line a river?" my mother would wonder. "Nope," my father would counter, "it says right here that a solid line is a paved road and a broken line an improved road or else a graded road, and a dark blue is a numbered state road and a light blue is used for other roads." But, what does it mean?" "What's the difference—let's try this road on the left."

There are books with reassuring names like *Network for Dummies*, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Internet*, and *Traveler's Guide to the Information Highway* which I consulted. None of them told me exactly what I wanted—what button to push to get from where I am to where I want to go.

They did enable me to learn enough of the language of computers to "talk a good game". I've progressed so far that, at times, I can converse with a fellow traveler of the network to the

complete mystification of bystanders. It reminded me of my father and Uncle Freeman and some of their friends discussing esoteric mysteries like the octane rating of Texaco Fire Chief gasoline, camshafts, spark plug settings and magnetos. "Honestly," my mother would complain to the other women, "I don't understand a word they're talking about." And the men would puff up their chests with pride and admit, that "well yes, it is pretty complicated, pretty complicated."

Uncle Freeman was also known for his criticism of other drivers. If someone neglected to roll down the window and extend an arm straight out before making a left turn, he would mutter "dang Sunday driver" or "woman driver" or other favorite expletives. An act of discourtesy on the highway may annoy (or infuriate) a few people; on the Internet a gaffe can affect thousands. One example of "netiquette" is that a response in all caps is the equivalent of shouting. As a typing tyro I sometimes inadvertently hit the caps-lock key and seem to be shouting all over the Network. A stupid question or message may provoke the equivalent of an obscene gesture in the form of the message RTFM (read the f...ing manual!). In my trial-and-error approach to this venture, I find myself muttering alibis to imaginary computer police who have flagged me for reckless driving on the information highway.

Recently I signed up for lessons about the Internet that someone from Alabama is giving over the Internet. The group is appropriately named ROADMAP (I'm not shouting!). In the first month 40,000 people have signed



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up so I'll have plenty of company. I'm a bit apprehensive, but in the back of my mind I can hear the family singing as we started up the flivver: "Oh we don't know where we're going but we're on our way."

For readers who are wondering whether to join me in exploring the Network I can offer this bit of advice.

If you hate to think of going back to the time of back roads and detours and "short cuts" and breakdowns, maybe you should pass it by. But if memories of roadsters and running boards and rumble seats stir something within you, like an itch to crank up the machine and go chugging and sputtering along some roads you haven't seen before. Well, in that case, the Internet is waiting for you. I'll be there shouting EXCUSE MY DUST!

○○○○

WILLIAM VAN WERT

### *Emerson Park*

Can you take the point of view of an inanimate object in a story? Say, a park, one that still exists, oblivious to the narrator who has grown up and gone away from it. So, a park out of childhood, wild with memories on late-night drives when the only other inhabitants are the occasional police cars with their search lights, looking for loiterers, homeless people, lovers in parked cars. I am

tempted to try the point of view of the park, but I would have to give it eyes, a conscience, a sentience that would personify and finally anthropomorphize the park into falsity.

The park is Emerson Park, situated in a valley at the South end of Midland, where downtown leaves off and the residential district starts up. You have to walk down or drive down into the park. It is shaped like a bowl, as though some gigantic meteor once hit this ground and left a crater. There is a road that circles the park, so you can drive around it and never stop to see it. The park is surrounded on three sides by the Titabawasee River, brown and polluted with chemical spills from Dow, filled only with the hardy carp with orange blotchy skin. There are picnic tables all around the edges of the park. Every class from every school held its end-of-year picnic here. Little League teams held their picnics here at the end of the summer baseball season.

In the middle of the park is a stadium, used for softball teams in the summer and for skating in the winter. Skaters trained for the Winter Olympics here. There is also an adjacent hockey rink that is big enough to be official-sized. Around the perimeter are five or six other miniature ball fields for Little League games, soccer matches and pee wee football. And, because there is such a steep descent into the park, the hills are perfect for sleds and toboggans. In addition, the park is home to joggers, walkers, people with dogs and frisbees.





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The park was always filled on Sundays. After Sunday church services, whole families descended on the park to spread their blankets and grill hot dogs. On the one side not bordered by water, there are train tracks. The freight trains used to come through here and stop at Dow on their way to Saginaw. When we were kids, we used to wave at the engineers and they would wave back. Sometimes, they blew their whistle as a greeting. If they were going slow enough, we would count the cars, then hop on the caboose as it passed and ride the rails to the next stop at the Dow plant. At some point, they got wise to us and began putting a man on the caboose. Then, you could jump the train in the middle and hope the car was empty. Or you could wave and watch. One time, I counted two hundred and eighty-seven cars. It was a long slow train. Sometimes, we held up the carp we caught to show the engineer. He gave us the *okay* sign with fingers circled. After he passed, we could throw the carp back into the Tittabawassee for the next time out. We knew the fish were too diseased to eat.

There weren't enough bathrooms at Emerson Park. There were the indoor bathrooms at the stadium, but they were closed if there were no softball games or skating going on. So, you had to climb up the embankment toward the train tracks and find a tree or clump of azalea bushes to pee. Nobody minded. Even the cops got out of their cars and went to the tracks to pee. It was socially acceptable behavior to pee this way. Everyone was on an honor system not to look or follow people who went toward the tracks.

If you had to go number two, you were in a bind. Grown ups would try to hold it or leave when they couldn't hold it any longer. Kids were different. If you crossed the road and went down the hill to the Tittabawassee, you could take a dump in the river and use tree leaves to wipe yourself.

By day the park was filled with families. The air was always crisp in the park: cool in the summers, downright chilly in the winter. By night, the park was a mystery, a vast playground full of shadows, where the picnic tables looked like crouching animals and the telephone poles looked like boogie men. It was a taboo place then. You knew you weren't supposed to be there, but that only added to the fun. If you had no place else to go, you always had Emerson Park.

But the park recedes, fades to black at night, seems to recoil from people whenever it can. Chilly Canadian winds blow through, the blizzards come, and snow fills in the frozen river. Accumulated snow seems to fill the valley. The picnic tables have tablecloths of snow. The children come to sled and build snowmen, but the park ignores them and seems to go into hibernation. There are no smells, either of daffodils or dandelions, in these February trees. Footing is treacherous. Knowing that, the children sometimes fall down on purpose or pee in their own tracks. Yellow snow. On the skating rink, ice and zigzag tracks, ruts the blades have made that look like kindergarten art. Breath turns to vapor. The wind chill lowers the official temperature fifteen degrees. No birds fly in the bare trees. Snow is alive, the one live thing that covers all others.



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No clues left of the dog days of summer. Totally exposed to nature. Nature's garbage dump. What comes down must go back up. In six months' time.

I am among the other children on the ice. I hate ice skating, because I can neither turn nor stop. I go forward until I fall or run into someone. Adults skate the rim of the rink. They seem to know that children on skates are dangerous. I veer off and hit them sometimes. They make good barriers.

Sometimes, I bounce off them and nobody falls. The skates hurt my ankles. I prefer the indoors where it's heated to the rink, itself. My eyes tear up and burn. My nose runs. My throat goes dry. Skating seems like a torture sport, but it's what we do to get away from our parents. We're supposed to love it. This is Michigan, the Winter Wonderland.

Or I am playing hockey on the rink adjacent to the skating rink. We choose up teams from the neighborhood. I have a deadly shot. I can sweep through the puck with my stick. I can lift the puck three feet off the ice, and I always hit the net. The only problem is: I can't skate. So I am always last. A scorer is no good if he has to stay on one side of the ice all the time. If he can't make turns and he can't stop, he is forced to watch more than he plays. In frustration, I learn to play goalie, because the goalie doesn't have to skate.

My favorite short story in grade school was Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," in which the snow gradually muffles the postman's step, swallows the sound of the stairs and comes for a young boy. It is his

"insanity," his approaching death, and his mother cannot stop it. I used to huddle under my covers and hold my pillow with both hands on nights of blizzard, thinking Snow, I won't go. In high school I memorized the lines from the Emily Dickinson poem: "remembered as freezing persons recollect the snow/ first chill, then stupor, then the letting go." And I thought of the man freezing to death in the Jack London story, while his dog watched from a safe distance. Literature could always make me shudder, every bit as much as the real world.

The park surveys itself like a tollway motel: in summer, total occupancy; in winter, vacancies. It freezes over and threatens with wind and frostbite through March. In April, it starts to melt with daily rains, some of them so heavy the Tittabawassee overflows and splashes against the icy sycamore trees. By mid-May it is alive again and teeming with ants, bees, squirrels and birds of all colors. The state bird is the robin. Almost extinct now, it comes to Emerson Park, as though this place were a designated sanctuary. The park wants to become jungle, sprouts more weeds than flowers at a ratio of five to one. In early June the Department of Parks and Recreation sends the cleanup crew to rake the mulch of matted leaves that have survived the snows like floxed paper in a gift box. Shrubs are pruned, trees are trimmed, picnic tables are revarnished, and the bases are installed on the softball fields. Open for business again.

My brothers and I come after rain on late-April nights when the ground is still hard and wet. We come in old blue



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jeans with flashlights and go down on our knees, crawling until we spot the night crawlers mating. We grab them and pull at them as they try to go back into the ground. We will use them for fishing in the nearby river, bait to catch the carp. We whisper and laugh a lot, but not too loud, for fear of scaring other worms away. We are caked in mud and dirt when we come home. My mother makes us strip immediately, so she can launder the clothes and save the carpets.

There are lots of fishing stories, but there are no stories, at least none that I know, that account for the bait. No digging for worms in fiction. No accounting for the moments of wrestling on wet ground between brothers who smell more like worms than people. On our good nights we come away with three or four dozen crawlers. On bad nights when the worms get away or snap in two, we get four or five, lots of dirt and more wrestling. Once in awhile, the police stop with their own flashlights to ask us what we're doing. They must all fish, because they let us continue.

On summer days when the sun bakes the streets and sidewalks, we go barefoot to the park, hopping from the heat until we cross the tracks and start our descent into the park. We leave the road then and walk in the cool grass. The grass is always cool in the park, because the sun only comes weakly and at a slant into the park. Even the ball fields stay cool. We run the bases in our bare feet and slide at every base. If your feet are refreshed, I decide, the whole body is refreshed. We dread the moment of leaving and the return to hot feet.

The park recedes like a hairline and furrows like a forehead when the sun goes down over the train tracks. It is our sign to go home for supper, if we haven't already done so. The park seems neither friendly nor hostile. It just is, like a library full of books you can't check out but never own. You check out your books and the stacks still seem full to overflowing. You can't make a dent in the stacks. The park is like that. Used to abuse, it seems to take a deep breath and recover during the night, long before the next day's onslaught of families.

The park is where you go to park and make out if you have a car. Everybody knows that. The best spots are always taken. I am in my junior year of high school, and I have a date next to me in the 1954 blue Chevy. It's not the fanciest car around, but the upholstery is comfortable, and there's lots of room to spread out. I leave the road and drive onto the grass. My date wants to know where I am going. You'll see, I tell her. I drive the car onto one of the softball fields and park it on the pitcher's mound. She wants to know what I'm doing. I tell her we will be safe here and no one will think to come park next to us. She is skeptical and will not relax. She seems vindicated when the police come with their flashlights. I want to tell them we're about to dig for worms, by they have heard it all before. They tell us to move along and we do. My date talks non-stop. She has diarrhea of the mouth, as we used to say. She talks about how dumb dating is. What a barbaric ritual it is. And what a bad driver I am. I disagree. I think the plan is sound. On another night it might have



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worked. With another date it might have worked.

The park is so full of moisture in the mornings that you'd swear it had rained during the night. The streets are dry, the sky is a haze of gray slate overhead, but the dew holds on the ground like a carpet.

You hear things in the park you don't hear anywhere else. Under a full moon you think you hear the whelp of coyotes, but you know there are no coyotes in the city. The trains go by and you think their whistle is a cry for help. Dogs bark at shadows and try to break free of their leash. I think of all these sounds as the Park Musical: lots of silence, punctuated by found sounds you can never find or name.

For all the imagined menace in the park, there was no crime in our childhood. The park was always scary, never frightening. Things have changed. Now the park is full of drug deals. The grass is littered with crack vials. There are homeless now, who huddle under torn Salvation Army blankets for warmth and pee on trees. They eat the trash left there by others and then litter the wrappers and napkins. The river is completely toxic now, and not only swimming but wading is forbidden. There have been occasional murdered and dismembered bodies found. Once one was found on top of a picnic table, as though left there on purpose for the next day's visitors. And people cruise the park at night to scare the parkers and make-out couples. There have been one of two drive-by shootings, still unsolved.

So the perimeter narrows for children growing up. Emerson Park has

lost its innocence. To go there now to hunt for worms would be asking for trouble. More police patrol the park and after an incident has happened there, they barricade the entrance.

The trains have stopped their run to Dow. The tracks are still there, but overrun with weeds. The rusty rails are a reminder of bygone days. Empty beer cans everywhere.

The park retreats at night, as though nothing had changed over time. Like a graveyard in which someone's grave has been vandalized, the park still houses all our memories as well as all the recent drug deals. It exists to exist, impersonal and savagely beautiful, as littered as the ground the circus used to be on, as cleansed as a waterfall grotto. Hollow and exposed to everything nature drops into it, its vulnerability is also its strength.

Imaginary coyote still howl at the moon when it's full, only now the howling sounds driven and a little desperate. Howling that sounds like a wounding. I didn't think you could wound an imaginary animal. Now that I'm grown, I know that you can.



WENDY BARKER

## Ithaca, On the Landing

How was it Penelope waited  
upstairs all those years,  
before he finally  
found his way back?  
Every night unraveling the weave,  
her fear of fixing to the wrong one  
knitting her nerves.  
But the wool kept the shape of the warp,  
she could not straighten the strands  
after so many nights.  
All day weaving with more and more  
wrinkled skeins, all night pulling out  
threads with her fingers,  
all that winding  
and rewinding, back and forth  
across the loom after breakfast,  
the sound of the soft  
contact between wool and wood,  
the rhythm, meshing  
color upon color, and then  
at night the whole thing in reverse,  
everything pulled apart  
until blue and silver  
strands turned dull, lost sheen.  
Sometimes she would stop, try to see  
beyond the window's flat shadow.  
She could not know him  
through that space, she could not  
know who he would be  
becoming in those years

of sailing, slipping into fern-  
lined coves, dashing his prow  
against headlands so splashed

with sun and spume  
that at first he couldn't even tell  
who lived there.

Who was it  
came home to her?  
And who was it he came home to

after all her nights unraveling?  
Sometimes during those  
unfinished years, sometimes under

the weight of a blunt moon,  
she thought she heard music,  
one of the men on the ground floor singing,

so softly singing, and once she leaned  
down over the upstairs landing to see  
how they lounged in her chairs.

She traveled their faces:  
not brutes, not swine, but men,  
beards curled across their cheeks.

Some young, smooth  
as the rubbed wood of her loom.  
And the lean one with the flute,

long thighs relaxed  
in sleep, smiling in his sleep.  
What if, at night,

she left her weaving alone?  
Let it grow, become whole?  
What might the tapestry become

if she stopped saying *no*  
over and over, refusing  
the downstairs of her own house?

JUSTIN CRONIN

## A Conversation with Madison Smartt Bell

Still in his thirties, novelist and short story writer Madison Smartt Bell has won a following among readers of serious literature that any author would envy. In the twelve years since the publication of his first novel, *The Washington Square Ensemble* (1983), Bell has published not one or two but six more, and a pair of story collections besides, all to wide acclaim. His work has appeared frequently in such publications as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Magazine*, and the annual *Best American Short Stories* anthologies, and among the many honors he's received are fellowships from both the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. In the midst of this, he manages—somehow—to teach, at Goucher College in Baltimore, where he lives with his wife, the poet Elizabeth Spires, and their young daughter.

Intellectually rich, tautly crafted, ambitious in scope and form, Madison Bell's fiction sets him apart from the vast majority of writers of his generation, weaned on the spare prose, buried emotions, and implied plots of the Minimalists. A rural Southerner by birth but an urban Easterner by habit, Bell brings to his work the rhythms and sensibilities of both regions, making a literature that, as novelist and critic Anne Bernays has written, "loves people and things the way they are while simultaneously expressing outrage that they are not better, wiser, kinder." Everywhere in Bell's work the reader finds extraordinary combinations, dramatic turns, and a bottomless appetite for story. In his last three novels alone, he has covered considerable territory. *Dr. Sleep*, published in 1991, is perhaps his most ambitious novel, telling the story of an insomniac hypnotist in contemporary London, whose nightly wanderings draw him into a high-profile murder case involving the London underworld (while making considerable structural reference to, among other things, 16th-Century Gnostic cosmology, the music of John Coltrane, and the London subway system). *Save Me, Joe Louis*, published two years later, takes the form of a road novel, chronicling the violent lurchings of two petty criminals en route from New York to Baltimore to the author's native Tennessee. Bell's newest novel, *All Souls Rising*, marks his first major foray into historical narrative. Set in 18th century Haiti during the slave rebellion, the novel is part of a planned trilogy and is due out in October.

In April 1994, Bell visited La Salle to read from the new book and visit with students who had been studying his work in a course on contemporary fiction. After class, we stopped at my house in the East Falls section of Philadelphia to talk.

JC: I'll start by asking you about your last two novels, *Dr. Sleep* and *Save Me, Joe Louis*. When I read them again, I thought I saw something new happening, perhaps a brewing confrontation between your love of plot and the more ruminant philosophical aspects of your work. How do we get from Adrian Strother, a hypnotist and modern-day practitioner of 16th-century hermeticism, to a petty thief like Macrae?

MB: To my mind, *Dr. Sleep* was the end of a whole trend in my work. The book is basically structured as a prayer, and Adrian Strother's internal monologue drives the story. After I had finished it, I realized in a way I hadn't before that all the novels I had written up to that time were spiritual pilgrimages of one kind or another. Though they are by and large couched in the form of thrillers, they're essentially experiments in religion. My model for that is Dostoyevsky, who was basically a thriller writer with a lot of religious obsessions that he was trying to work out. I wasn't completely aware of this strain in my own work until I'd finished *Dr. Sleep*, or was well on the way to finishing it. In my first book, *Washington Square Ensemble*, there's a rather complicated argument going on between Islam and santeria; the next book, *Waiting For the End of the World* is basically about Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and the next—that's *Straight Cut* I'm speaking of—is about philosophical Christianity under the aegis of Kierkegaard. *The Year of Silence* is a novel about life in a world *without* religion, based on the ideas of French existentialism. In *Soldier's Joy* we're back to primitive Christianity, and then in *Dr. Sleep*, it's hermetic Gnosticism and the writings of Giordano Bruno. To me, this last one seemed like the answer. I think the idea that the universe *is* divinity is viable as a fundamental precept for a reformed religion for our time.

So after I finished that, I decided I couldn't write that kind of book anymore, and I started two new projects. One was the historical novel about the Haitian slave rebellion, and the other was a novel that I'd planned earlier, which became *Save Me, Joe Louis*. To my mind, *Save Me, Joe Louis* doesn't have the kind of philosophical system beneath it that the others do, at least not one that I was aware of. It's pretty much anarchic. To an almost comical extent, the main character is living in such a way that he doesn't know his intentions until he has already enacted them. Then he looks back and thinks, "Hmm, this seems to be not planned." Macrae is an internally silent character. I fumbled my way toward this structure because I think it's a fairly accurate picture of the way small time criminals operate. They're not geniuses, and they're not particularly good planners; most crimes are not very thoughtful acts.

JC: The southward motion of those characters from New York to Baltimore and back to the territory that you originally inhabited, and that we see in *Soldier's Joy*—was that part of the original plan, or did it just evolve?

MB: Well, some of that was preconceived. Certainly by the time I got to the end of the New York section, I had figured out all the rest of the characters' movements, but the plot of the book unfolded from circumstance. That was the way I wanted to do it, to make it seem almost random.



JC: You said in class today that after you finished *Dr. Sleep*, you felt for a while that you couldn't move on.

MB: I experienced some real confusion and depression after I finished *Dr. Sleep*, because I really liked the book. To my mind, it didn't have any serious flaws, and it was what I'd always wanted to do, and I could see how the tendencies of all the other books fed into it. I considered not writing any more, either slitting my throat or going to law school. *(laughs)* Those thoughts continually ran through my mind. I haven't taken that course, so I guess you could say they weren't serious considerations, but they did prey on me for about a year after I finished *Dr. Sleep*.

JC: But there wasn't really a gap in the writing between *Dr. Sleep* and *Save Me, Joe Louis*. There couldn't have been, given the publishing schedule.

MB: There was, though, for me. I usually only take about a one week break. That time it was more like six months. In fact, it seems to me now that it was nearly a year, but maybe that's not true; maybe it was just a few months. I know I started *Save Me, Joe Louis*, and I think what I did was piddle with the Haitian material a little bit without getting anywhere. I finished *Dr. Sleep* in the summer. I remember that because I was in London, and I actually finished writing and typing the final chapter sitting in Russell Square at a little picnic table. The weather was atypically pleasant for London, so I was working outside. I think it must have been the next summer that I really started *Save Me, Joe Louis*. At that point I'd written maybe fifty pages of the Haitian thing. That, to me, is not work.

JC: About your new work on the Haitian slave rebellion: I recently reread Russell Banks' *Continental Drift* and was reminded of the animism of voodoo and African religion. Is that what drew you to the subject?

MB: Partially. When I was trying to research santer'a for my first novel, I ended up reading a lot about voodoo because more has been more written about it. There's a kind of structural similarity between the two, and the more you read Haitian history, the more you see how voodoo played a part in the rebellion because the structure of that religious community was cellular, the way that revolutionary organizations are cellular. They had these little congregations, groups of people and a priest and a kind of secret language that was already in place. And they had a communication structure—a spider web—that was all ready to go, which is why, I think, Toussaint L'Ouverture tried to suppress voodoo when he came to power in Haiti. He was always nominally Christian and a publicly devout Catholic, but I believe that he was a voodoo practitioner, too. Although this is an unorthodox reading, I believe his motive for suppressing voodoo was not Christian devotion or the desire for a single religion in the country but the understanding that the structure of voodoo observance could be used to organize an insurrection because he'd used it himself.

JC: What would you say is the center of the new book? What drives it?

MB: I'd been probably working on it for three or four years before I figured this out. The ultimate question behind the novel is: what's a human being? This question is easily overlooked, because in our society it's theoretically no longer an issue. It's generally understood that regardless of skin color, human beings are all human. You don't find any serious exception taken to that. But in the 18th century this belief was not generally shared. It was held by some people, but it was quite seriously being argued at the time that black people were the missing link between apes and men, that they were indeed less than human and that this was sufficient justification for slavery.

JC: For the record, the new work on the Haitian slave rebellion is a trilogy. Could you describe the narrative shape of each of the three books? The question is kind of cumbersome, I know. Let's start with the decision to write it as three books.

MB: It seemed to me that the complexity of the politics was so great that I couldn't cover it in one novel of reasonable length. There were too many factions, and I'd have to have an incredibly large cast. I quickly saw that if I did it as one book, it would be about 2000 pages long and probably not publishable. If we still lived in a culture where you could write a novel the length of *War and Peace* I would probably just do that. But that's not the way it works. In fact, it was psychologically easier on me to subdivide the story. It made the project more conceivable.

Each individual novel is designed so that there will be closure, and it will function as an autonomous novel. The structure resembles *The Year of Silence*, but played on a larger scale with a smaller number of parts. The resolutions of the three novels depend mostly on things that go on in the lives of fictional characters who are involved in these historical events. My ultimate plan is that if you read all three books together as one book, Toussaint L'Ouverture will emerge as the protagonist of the story. I'm pretty confident I can get that to work. I have experience with those kinds of designs. The first volume, *All Souls Rising*, is written, and it's on the way.

The peculiarity of this first volume is that Toussaint L'Ouverture is not hugely prominent, because it covers a period when very few of his activities were known. He didn't show his hand in the revolution until comparatively late. Initially, he appeared as a subordinate to some other black leaders. He gradually broke off from them and eventually eliminated them.

The first volume begins with an outbreak of insurrection in 1791, and stops in 1794 with a watershed event, which was the burning of the principal city. White factional politics was really the cause, but what ultimately happened was that tens of thousands of disorganized blacks, not Toussaint's party actually, were admitted to the city by one group of whites who were trying to overcome the others. The whole thing went crazy, and they burned the place down. That's the conclusion of the volume I've completed.

The second volume covers all these military successes of Toussaint's middle period. War in Europe between France and Spain had caused the Spanish people in Santo Domingo, which is at the other end of the island of Haiti, to subsidize the black revolutionaries. At one point the black revolutionaries were

even incorporated, at least theoretically, into the Spanish army. Many of them did this in the early period and they invaded the French part of the island as Spanish soldiers. Because Toussaint had gotten news of the abolition of slavery by the French National Assembly, he suddenly changed sides at a moment when the French were totally embattled. There was an English invasion going on the other end of the island, and they had all these black insurgencies to deal with, and they were blockaded; the French position was completely hopeless. All of a sudden Toussaint comes over to their side. He attacked the Spanish and the English on two fronts, won both and negotiated a treaty with the English. After this, a war broke out between the mulattos and blacks, which was called the "War of Knives" because the participants would frequently throw down their swords and pistols in favor of using their nails and teeth to attack each other. Their antipathy ran very deep, sort of visceral and primary.

Volume three is the story of Napoleon's invasion. Napoleon comes to power and things in France get much more conservative. Napoleon sends about 25,000 soldiers to Haiti, commanded by his brother-in-law. This force misread the situation, basically; they were supposed to go down there, briefly put down the slave rebellion and restore slavery, although these were secret orders. Later they were to go on to Louisiana and invade the United States. Haiti would function as a supply post for this maneuver. The truly interesting thing is that if Napoleon had cooperated with Toussaint, he could have led a multi-racial French-sponsored invasion of the United States through Louisiana. Napoleon acknowledges this mistake in his memoirs. Ironically, a fair number of the people who were prominent in the Haitian slave revolution got their military experience fighting in the American Revolutionary War under Lafayette. So the whole thing made perfect sense. It sounds ridiculous now, but at the time it wasn't at all ridiculous. If Napoleon had succeeded, everything south of the Mason-Dixon line would be like Martinique is now.

That was all completely possible, but instead Napoleon wanted to depose Toussaint, restore white supremacy, and ultimately restore slavery. Napoleon's brother-in-law, Leclerc, arrives with zillions of French soldiers, they fight all these battles, and finally negotiate a settlement with the insurgents. Toussaint was sold out by his own subordinates. There was a lot of unauthorized surrendering on the part of black generals who wanted to believe that the French were sincere in their claim that black liberty was close to their hearts. Leclerc also promised that black generals who acknowledged French authority would retain their rank. A lot of Toussaint's aides de camp believed these claims and went over. Only one held out to the end, Jean Jacques Dessalines, who negotiated a truce whereby he would retain his rank. Toussaint was isolated. He was shortly thereafter entrapped and deported to France in secrecy.

Meanwhile, the fever season began. A lot of French soldiers got sick. Black resistance had never stopped completely, but it broke out again at the height of the French fever epidemic. News came that slavery had been restored in Martinique, and the whole thing just caught on fire. Napoleon lost 25,000 men in this operation, another little known fact. A lot of them were killed. One of the ways this is usually presented is that they died of yellow fever, but a lot of them were killed, probably half.

JC: What are some of the problems you've encountered writing an historical novel? I'm thinking especially of a place like Haiti, with a very complicated history dominated by some strong personalities.

MB: The worst thing about it is the temptation to generalize more. If you're writing a story that takes place today, you have access to a good deal of precise information, all the things that make fiction engaging, that address the senses. When I start describing some character in 18th century Haiti and I want to say what she's wearing, or what she had for breakfast or what she does in her spare time, I have to somehow find these things out. Everyday minutiae that you would simply know if you were writing about events in our own lifetime—all of that material has to be researched or faked. It's very time consuming. It's also very interesting. In fact, the research that you do tends to make you a fanatic.

Another thing that bugs me about it is not really knowing how anybody looked. In Toussaint L'Ouverture's case, there are verbal descriptions and several portraits, but they don't resemble each other at all. They could be six different guys. A lot of them are probably fake anyway. It's like looking for a picture of Crazy Horse. With the Europeans, this drives me crazy because I know that somewhere there are probably fairly accurate pictures of these people, but I don't have any idea how I'm supposed to find them. What do I say about the person's face? So that kind of thing can be very taxing.

JC: Is it confining to work within a recorded series of events?

MB: It took me a while to figure this out, but once I did it wasn't so difficult. The historical text becomes the subtext of the novel, so you're really reading a story about people, and you learn of the history insofar as it affects them. Every now and then there are certain key transitional episodes where I have enough documentation to do a fully realized scene that is historically true. The other scenes that are written like that are about key political decision or key political events. The rest of the novel is such that I can't put the *real* people on stage, and don't have to.

JC: To change the subject slightly, your essay in the *Chattahoochee Review* begins by addressing "Southernness" as a feature of your writing. In what way do you perceive yourself as someone whose writing has a regional aspect? Do you see your yourself as a writer operating within a particular tradition or a set of artistic habits?

MB: I feel like I am a Southern writer. Since I haven't written that much with a Southern subject matter, I'm off that hook to some degree, but my prose style is very much influenced by growing up in the South and doing my first serious reading of literary fiction from the fiction of the Southern Renaissance. That's all kind of in the back of my brain, as a writer.

JC: So what about your sensibility is particularly Southern? What is the difference?

*MB:* I never have wanted to be a "professional" Southern writer. That's kind of tedious. I'm not sure I could talk about this without reciting a lot of cliches, but a lot of the cliches are sort of true. I kind of take Walker Percy's attitude toward this. The sense of human limitation, which may or may not be expressed in religious terms, has been a little bit different in the South ever since the Civil War because the experience of defeat was not shared, until recently, by the rest of the country. The fact that I come from a culture that was basically eradicated in a war has some effect on the way I see the world. For a long time, even in my childhood, there was a sense in the South that the rest of the country was racing at the galloping pace of industrial and technological prosperity on a long, long trajectory to nowhere, something we'd already experienced. I'm not somebody who sits around and nurses grievances about the Civil War; I don't think many people in my generation do, but certainly my grandparents could remember specific events that they'd been told about by their parents, and they're still personally pissed off about this stuff. Now we're coming into a time where national experience is able to serve up experiences of disenfranchisement of one kind or another to almost everyone, irrespective of region.

*JC:* In my experience, living for a year in Memphis, it seemed that the sense of proximity to the past, to *that* past was so much greater there than I had ever imagined.

*MB:* In some ways it's hard for me to understand why people don't feel the same way in the North, because if you look at the death toll, at the number of soldiers killed in combat, there were as many of y'all as there were of us. Somehow, it seems to make a difference whose territory the war was mostly conducted on.

For me the connection is not direct; it's not personal. But because it did directly and personally effect the people who were raising me, I got a diluted sense of it, much more an abstract philosophical attitude than any kind of structured position. A lot of the Southern fiction that I cut my teeth on was predicated on the idea that—disregarding the whole slavery issue, which is sort of necessary for this reasoning, and thus renders it, shall we say, incomplete—the Civil War was really a conflict between the pastoral way of life and the industrial way of life, which is true; it's just not the whole truth.

*JC:* It may be a way of remembering the truth.

*MB:* It's not the only thing that is true about the Civil War. It conveniently disregards the fact that the pastoral way of life depended on slavery, which was completely untenable. But the idea that industrial society is a trap, that it tends to lead to its own destruction—I think that's true.

*JC:* "A vector placing us in permanent proximity to our absolute destruction," as you've called it.

*MB:* That's right. I think the person who in my reading brought me into the latter half of the 20th century was Walker Percy, who has a very traditional, conservative Southern attitude toward history. The interesting thing about Walker Percy as a Southern writer is that he didn't write about the past. He tended to write science-fiction, instead. He was interested in teleology, how the present was going to form the future. According to Percy, it's all spelled out in the message of the Bible. Everyone inside the Judeo-Christian tradition tends to refer original sin and failings of human nature to some kind of aboriginal catastrophe, some version of the Fall from the garden of Eden story. For Southerners, the aboriginal catastrophe tends to be the Civil War. Things were better before, theoretically, for white people. This is *not* a point of view held by blacks, I don't imagine.

What that means is that certain vicissitudes of modern life, like ecological catastrophe or the threat of nuclear war, are seen, from a Southern point of view, as inevitable, as something that comes to everybody. There's going to be a point in every culture, every society, where your momentum in one way or another is broken, whether by violence or by exhaustion. It seems to me that's happening in America now, across the board.

*JC:* With only a couple of exceptions, you have *not* written about the South *per se*, by which I mean use it as a setting. Many of your characters are Southerners, but their living somewhere else. Even characters who aren't technically Southern seem to share a related state of spiritual and physical exile, a sense of not being properly at home.

*MB:* Yes, and again, this is a big Walker Percy theme, this sense of estrangement. To some extent, this aspect of my work does draw on personal experience, because I've lived most of my adult life out of the South. To a certain extent, I feel like a pilgrim. I feel like someone on a very extended visit. On the other hand, I've been gone so long that when I go back to Tennessee, which I do with considerable regularity, I feel the same way there. There's no place where I feel fully at home.

*JC:* Where's the last place you felt fully at home?

*MB:* I don't know. I guess I feel most fully at home on my family farm in Tennessee, but it's increasingly difficult to think it can be preserved as a physical space, because the subdivisions are gnawing their way toward it constantly. I felt connected to the poorer sections of Brooklyn in a way that puzzled me for a long time. The best answer I can come up with is the Southern belief that any society based totally on frenetic industrial advance is bound for destruction. An industrial slum—where the manufacturing is gone, and the sidewalks are broken, and the streets are full of people who speak languages unknown to you, where everything is falling down and decaying—sort of bears that out. Urban decay is evidence of a cyclical return to the soil. The well organized, highly functioning parts of New York City have never appealed to me. The ghettos are more comfortable for me because they're atavistic. The way life is lived there is like village life. The physical structures

are submitting to natural process in a way that buildings on 5th Avenue don't.

JC: You've made yourself a spokesman, or anti-spokesman, for a certain kind of writing. I'm thinking of your essay in *Harper's* in 1985, in which you made a claim that a good deal of contemporary writing was overly influenced by a few practitioners. I really have three questions here: Is Minimalism dead? What did it accomplish? And how did you, as a young writer, manage to avoid it? It seemed to have barely mussed your hair.

MB: I wouldn't say I did avoid it. First of all, Minimalism isn't dead. It never will be dead. Hemingway created that mode. He stole things from his predecessors, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein and even, to a certain extent, Kipling, and he welded them into something really new, which is an example of the proverb: small talents borrow; great talents steal.

Hemingway's stories are based on the model of Freudian repression. The problem in the story is unstated, and the characters are very laconic about it. Much of the story has scrubbed away, but it's still there; the reader knows it's there, because its presence is felt. Hemingway worked all of this out, theoretically. He achieved it, too, by editing his own work ruthlessly. He would try to see how much of the story he could cut and have the story still make sense and retain its mood and its subterranean tendencies. It's masterpiece fiction, and it's still a perfectly viable mode. He had hosts of imitators while he was alive, all of whom are now forgotten. Right around the time he blew his head off, Raymond Carver was just beginning to publish his first stories. Carver rewrote all his early work, but if you go look at *Best Short Stories of 1968* and read "Will You Please Be Quiet Please," you'll see it's 40 pages long. Need I say more? He did the same thing, and he was aware of what he was doing: reifying Hemingway.

JC: He reinvented a bunch of stories that way—"So Much Water So Close to Home."

MB: Yeah, sure. Hemingway's developmental period is lost because of a missing suitcase. Carver went back and systematically swept away his tracks. Carver was a big enough talent to do the things that Hemingway did with Anderson, Stein and the rest.

Then come the host of Carver's opportunistic imitators, who wrote stories that had his mannerisms, but for no particular reason. There isn't any subtext. Writing without subtext is extraordinarily hollow; there's nothing to attach to. So here's where I begin to have a problem.

I think that the fad of Carver imitators is pretty much finished. But I certainly don't think that approach is defunct, nor do I think it should be. It's also worth mentioning that a lot of this has more to do with the economics of publishing than with any aesthetic questions. The ascendancy of the Carver-Hemingway style happened to coincide with a peculiar moment in publishing when it was discovered that short story collections could be presented as a novelty. A six or eight year fad brought the short story back into the public eye in what, I think, was ultimately a good way. I've benefited from it. I think I had an easier

time publishing my books of stories because of the momentum that had been started by Carver and Carver imitators, whose work I don't especially like. And it brought to greater prominence a lot of other writers who had been around for a long time but had been relatively ignored, writers like Peter Taylor and Andre Dubus. Grace Paley suddenly got a new lease on life. But all that appears to be over, too.

JC: This leads to something else I was curious about. A lot of good mid-list writers of literary fiction are at this point in some peril from changes in the publishing world. You wrote in the *Mississippi Review* last year that there was a lot of good literary fiction being written right now, perhaps more than ever before, but that the outlook from the publishing standpoint was dire and getting worse all the time. Has that changed at all?

MB: From the point of view of short story writers, things are really bad now. The situation is back to where it was before 1977. If you're a new writer, you can basically forget about publishing a collection of short stories unless it's stapled to a novel in a two book contract. Collections are just more difficult to describe and promote. They don't lend themselves to capsule description. I think there will be a resurgence, but publishing tends to be the canary down the coalmine of the general economy. People stop buying books before they stop going to the movies, buying drinks, buying cars. I'm eagerly waiting for some sign of recovery, because the rest of the economy seems to be picking up, but that doesn't mean things will go back to the way they were before, because whole houses have been eliminated. That's what happened in January of 1994 when Harcourt Brace, Ticknor and Fields, and Athenaeum effectively closed their doors, to literary fiction, at least. I don't think they're going to be replaced.

JC: It seems to me that more writers are going to have to look to smaller houses whose stock-in-trade is literary fiction, places like Ecco Press and Algonquin.

MB: The funny thing is that's been predicted for at least twenty-five years by intelligent observers, but it hasn't really happened. The pace of change is a lot slower and the nature of the change is not what people thought. I think it was a case of commercial publishing being lifted by the rising tide of the general economy, but the bogus boom of the 1980s saw the prominent success of some fairly literary writers.

JC: It seems like commercial publishers co-opted and popularized literary fiction and, maybe, in the process, created some false hopes.

MB: I don't know if those hopes were false. Again, my career was lifted, too. I was a beneficiary. The sluggishness of publishing is the discouraging thing. Whenever it takes a long steep dive, the way it has now, things become frightening because there's so much consolidation. Now every publishing house of any size in New York can be traced back to one of seven conglomerates. That's a real structural change. It gives me pause, but I think that the



feeling of constriction will probably go away again, unless the general economic trend is irreversible.

JC: What do you think we need from our writers right now? I read your work and it's so intellectually dense, I feel that perhaps you're saying we need a more ambitious fiction. Certainly you write fiction of an intellectually ambitious kind. You've also talked about the virtues of cross-pollination, writers that are both literary and popular.

MB: Cormack McCarthy is a writer I've admired for a long time. I still admire him. He has ceased to be particularly obscure, so I don't think he needs much of a lift from me. People who have lately become interested in him should go back and read his earlier books. I think Mary Gaitskill is a terrific writer. Of all the urban, New York fiction that was written in the 80s, I think she is probably the only writer whose work will be of real interest in ten years. I think those books are going to really grow. William Vollmann is really the most exciting new writer to come along in quite some time. His brand of experimentalism has really broken a number of molds and created very liberating possibilities for other writers.

JC: He's brought back the visible writer, put the writer back in the frame, so to speak.

MB: Yes, but in a very different way from what we had in the 60s.

JC: Do you think he's more on the mold of George Orwell? I'm thinking of *Down and Out in Paris and London* or *Homage to Catalonia*.

MB: Yeah, or Poe. (laughs) Really, those are the sort of writers he likes. He's not particularly amenable to 60s metafiction.

JC: I don't think his work is metafiction at all.

MB: Well, technically it is. He uses that same bag of tricks, but the nature of his enterprise is very different. What we got before was a fundamentally insincere demonstration of cleverness and agility. Suppurating sincerity is all over everything Vollmann does, and it's really touching. The idea that you can use those devices and somehow be an *authentic* presence in the work instead of some Mephistophelian manipulator is really quite new. I don't recall anybody doing it quite that way. In twenty or thirty years I think people will be playing off of some of his innovations in the way that a whole generation of writers played off Faulkner and Joyce.

JC: A final question: which of your own novels is closest to your heart?

MB: I'll say about this what Vollmann said about the worst book he's published so far, *An Afghanistan Picture Show*, which he called "a masterpiece of failure."

Aesthetically, I think *Dr. Sleep* is my masterpiece to date. It's as good as I can make a book and I'm really very happy with it as an aesthetic object, but in terms of communicating the message of the story, it was a masterpiece of failure too.

There's something kind of appropriate there, because Giordano Bruno's life was very much like that. He was a writer. He was multi-lingual, and he would drift from country to country trying to get people to entertain his ideas, which were very dangerous because they could kill you for heresy in those days. His tracts were disguised as popular literary forms of the day, cycles of love sonnets in Italian, dramas, and so on. Buried underneath it were themes of religious reform that were recognizable to people who might somehow be competent to recognize them. Eventually they did, and he was duly burned at the stake. So I have my main character, Adrian Strother, doing the same thing. He goes around and whenever he starts spouting all this hermetic nonsense, everybody sticks his fingers in his ears. The response to the novel bore out the character's experience perfectly. People enjoyed it. At least the reviewers did. Every now and then I meet a reader with a wild, deranged look in her eyes, who actually understood this stuff. But for the most part, everybody, without exception, was completely bewildered by it. What people seemed to like was the thriller shell in which it was wrapped. I certainly didn't expect that all the readers of the book would convert to Gnostic hermeticism, but I guess I thought the message would be understood and observed somehow. I couldn't get anyone to listen to it anymore than Giordano Bruno could.

So there you have it. I'm not complaining. It's nice for me that they no longer burn people at the stake.

April 28th, 1994



E. B. DE VITO

## Roses

Whenever I see roses,  
I find it strange to think  
there have been some  
who looked with distaste  
or dislike at a rose:

Queen Anne for one;  
a painter for another;  
an Italian poet for one more.

Cocteau told how  
Proust's housekeeper, Celeste,  
alert to his sensitivities,  
screened his callers  
with a dragon eye  
to make sure that one of those  
did not brush him  
with a hand that  
might have touched a rose.

But who could hate roses?

Perhaps some one, who  
knowing all cultivated flowers  
were wildflowers once,  
remains unreconciled  
to a bloom with thorns  
like claws unsheathed;  
a blossom where there is,  
in all this cultivation,  
this domestication,  
still something wild.

PAMELA STEED HILL

## Why We Are Here

Having lived through thirty years  
 of Grandpa muttering weekly *the rain*  
*is angels spitting at us*,  
 I slip out now to the wet lawn  
 and look for signs of divinity: inhuman  
 mucus perhaps, or a spray of strange  
 dew draped across the forsythia.  
 Not to my surprise, it is there.  
 Dampness carves a delicate canyon  
 down the ragged birch, its murky white  
 skin dulled by the water.  
 My hands moving across it are hands  
 moving across time.

The long grass has withstood its  
 baptism, and in the midst of the green,  
 I pick up something yellow. A strand  
 of angelic hair I'm sure,  
 and Grandpa's voice in my head  
 warns me not to look up for I'll *get*  
*an eyeful*; but, Grandpa, you know  
 I never was one to listen. A light  
 shower begins again, and I catch  
 the sweet drool on my lips, in my eyes,  
 in the curling mop of my hair. I hum  
 into the rain and it is the hum  
 of something infinite: wind  
 in the troposphere, a god  
 explaining his existence.

A Story by  
JOE COOGAN

## *What's So Sacred About the Heart?*

"Two dead men fighting," Tim Leary tells Steve, his sixty-two year old son. "One has only one arm, the other's in a wheelchair."

Tim, sitting in an armchair against the end wall of the corridor, dips his pipe into a pouch and tamps the tobacco firmly in the bowl. Sitting next to him is another eighty-something-year old, "Singer" Smith, who has a habit of breaking into song, *one* song, a ribald parody of "Tipperary."

"Sister Agatha grabbed the wheelchair and pushed it down the hall," Singer says.

Tim casts a quick, awed glance at Singer, half covers his mouth and says to Steve in the loud whisper of the deaf, "The man's a University graduate."

"I know, Pappy," says Steve, who is also a university graduate (Penn '53), though that has apparently made little impression on Tim. Looking squarely at his father to help Tim read his lips, he asks, "Can we go to your room?" and on the way says, "Jack told me he doesn't owe you a cent: you gave him the five thousand for room and board."

"He's a damn liar and it was six. Talk to him again. He's your brother."

"He's your son."

"I don't see him often these days."

Tim's afraid of Jack, who's two years younger than Steve. Short, short-tempered, shaved head, a genial manner and a sharp, sarcastic tongue.

"She's the one responsible," Tim says. "The woman's a wasp."

The family believes Jack is under his wife's thumb. Steve's children call them "Aunt Jack and Uncle Bunny." Tim finds blaming Jack difficult, for it's Jack he has long loved, Jack who has not gone to college, who has stayed close to the old neighborhood in downtown Philadelphia, who has a clerical job with the Post Office, and who still goes to mass.

Seven years ago, soon after Steve's mother died, the block of houses the Learys lived in was condemned and torn down to make room for a real estate development that has yet to be built. Perhaps afraid of losing face with their neighbors, Jack and Bunny told Tim that if he went to live anywhere except with them he'd rarely see them or their children again.

As they approach Tim's room they hear a cheerful racket and enter to see Tim's roommate, Jim Flaherty, a thin old man with bulging eyes and nose, sitting with a smile glued to his face while his middle-aged daughter claps her hands and his granddaughter, a knife-thin, darkeyed child, pounds her feet like pistons on the floor, her upper body as unyielding as steel.

"That's enough dear," her mother says.

"She's a great little dancer," Jim tells Tim.

"Enough dear," her mother says but the girl, her eyes fixed on the wall above Jim's bed, steps up the tempo.

"That's grand, but stop it!" Jim clamps his hands over his ears.

The mother says, "Catherine, enough."

Catherine is in a far off world, determined to dance forever. Steve and Tim wave and leave.

"You're walking better," Steve says.

"It comes and goes, mostly goes, but the legs feel better today."

"You remember I won't be here next week. I have to go to Los Angeles. But Anne will come."

Tim looks up at his son's creased face and balding head framed by wisps of white hair. "You've got the right idea, Steve. Travel while you're still young."

"If Jack comes to see you, talk to him."

"For all the good it would do I might as well be talking to the cat."

"I'm trying to remember. Did she take the cat with her that time?"

They laugh as Tim says, "It was what? Three Thanksgivings ago?"

"Four."

Steve and Anne had gone to Jack's and Bunny's to visit Tim, who had become something of a recluse, seldom leaving the house. They were startled when they went into the living room and found it completely bare, not a stick of furniture in it.

Jack, unconvincingly jovial, said, "The couch and chairs are being reupholstered. We'll sit in the kitchen."

"And the television?" Steve asked.

"Being fixed. It's on the blink."

"Isn't Bunny here?" Anne asked.

"Visiting her brother in Ohio."

"Glad they patched things up," Anne said.

Tim came out of his room, which had once been the front parlor, and they sat around the kitchen table. When Jack got up to get a quart of beer out of the refrigerator—he and Bunny put away about two cases a week—Tim said in a whispered shout, "She left him you know."

Jack gave no sign of having heard.

"When he was at work she had a truck pull up and everything went out."

Jack said, "We're having hot dogs and grilled cheese sandwiches. You're welcome to stay."

It was Anne's theory that having estranged their four children and almost everyone else in the family, Jack and Bunny had no one to fight with but themselves. "Scorpions in a bottle," she'd said.

During the divorce proceedings the house was sold and Tim elected to move into the nursing home, which would have been impossible if Sister Agatha, a cousin of Anne, hadn't slipped his name up to the head of the waiting list. About a year and a half after the divorce, Bunny and Jack had both married again—to each other. "Two old boxers longing to get back in the ring," Steve had said, which may have had a certain truth to it for they had separated again about three months ago.

Tim now says, "Since she's not around he may be more sensible. Talk to him. He'll listen to you."

"I wouldn't count on it, especially if he's been drinking."

When drinking, Jack adopted an air of aloof superiority. Shortly after their mother died he had called Steve once or twice a week to say in what he thought was an “upper class” accent, “By whose authority did your wife go through my deceased mother’s top drawer and remove the contents?” Referring to some old photos of the brothers as children, report cards, valentines, things like that which Anne had brought over for Jack and Bunny to choose from. Apparently they thought she’d held out something valuable. “I merely wish to know on whose authority.” Much later, when Tim had been asking for the return of the money he’d lent him, Jack made another series of calls reassuring Steve that he’d pay the debt when Tim died by adding twenty-five hundred dollars to Steve’s share of the will.

“Bunny wants it,” Anne told Steve. “So when she filed for divorce the debt disappeared. The money became an asset.”

“I wish Pappy would forget it,” Steve said. “He’s as bad as Jack.”

Now, after leaving Tim, Steve pays a visit to Anne’s cousin, Danny Burns, Sister Agatha’s brother. Danny is an irritable, foul-mouthed old reprobate, a chronic alcoholic whom Steve has rescued a few times after he’d been peeled off the street and popped into jail. A stroke (“God’s blessing,” Agatha had said) had brought him to the nursing home and the unswerving attention of his sister, determined to save his soul.

Danny, a captive audience, is lying in bed with his back propped up, glaring at Agatha as she reads aloud from a bible.

“‘Father forgive them for they know not what they do,’” she’s saying, then closes the book when she sees Steve. “We’re meditating on Christ’s last words.”

Danny mumbles something in a weak voice and Agatha says, “Daniel, use your teeth. He can talk perfectly clearly with his teeth in but he won’t wear them.”

Surprisingly, Danny takes the teeth from a bedside stand, pushes them in his mouth and smiles at Steve. “Bullshit,” he says.

“Clear as a bell,” Steve says and laughs and Danny laughs, gurgles, pulls out the teeth and sinks back on the bed.

“Time to go,” Steve says and Agatha nods and opens the bible.

“‘I thirst,’” she reads, picking, thinks Steve, the one biblical passage Danny can empathize with.

While in Los Angeles Steve, who has his own communication company, reviews some projects—an exhibit and a teaching film—with a pharmaceutical company client and attends a large party at the home of an old Army buddy who’s become a producer, where he meets the celebrated writer, Bryan Garret Burns.

“My wife has relatives named Burns. From Wicklow. Where’s your family from?”

Languidly. “I’ve no idea.”

“You’ve been to Ireland?”

“Never. Oh yes, once briefly. We left Paris to attend a wedding in Dublin.”

“A gracious thing to do,” Steve said.

An Irishman allergic to being Irish.

He returned to Philadelphia in time for Danny Burns’ funeral.

The body is on view from eight to nine a.m. at the back of the nursing home's chapel. Standing near the casket are three sixtyish, rawly shaved men in unaccustomed suits. One is holding a folded flag.

Tim Leary, walking with a cane, enters and kneels on the padded priedieu beside the casket. Pushing himself up he comes over to where Steve and Anne are standing.

"At least one of those lads is treating a bad hangover," he says. "Did you smell the hooch on him?"

Anne giggles. "Danny's buddies from the American Legion Post or, rather, its bar, his home away from home. The reason for the eight in the morning call is that Cousin Aggie figured they wouldn't show up at this hour. Damage control. If the wake had been held last night in a funeral home waves of them would flow to and from the bar."

"She's trying to steer them to pews."

"To *one* pew, the last one in the back, before they ruin the family image."

Tim says, "If Danny gets a good whiff of them he may hop out the box."

"If he does," Anne says, "I'd hate to be God. Aggie would never let him hear the end of it."

And now the nuns from Agatha's convent come in, a long, slow-moving line; they quickly kneel, pray and rise before the casket and continue down the aisle. One of the Legionnaires drops to his knees and crosses himself and Agatha moves swiftly toward him and says something that brings him sharply to his feet and, with his companions, to the back pew.

The mass is a long, highly solemn affair featuring an auxiliary bishop and three priests. The bishop, who never knew Danny, gives a generic eulogy in a beautiful voice and the congregation streams slowly out.

"The Black Sea," Tim says and Singer Smith, who's standing with him near the chapel door, as awe-struck as if he's seen a vision of Mary, says, "Fifty-three! Fifty-three nuns! And four priests on the altar. He must have been a very holy man, though you'd never know it to talk to him. Down to earth."

"He is now," Tim says.

A chill wind and watery sky at the cemetery. An honor guard of soldiers fires into the air. (Steve vaguely remembers that Danny served briefly in the army when very young.) As if returning the shots there's a crack of thunder and pellets of rain whip against the spectators. Umbrellas blossom, the bishop speeds through his prayer, the Legionnaires pull the flag from the casket lid and flowers are flung on it. The shivering Legionnaires bolt for their car, the nuns process to theirs.

Everyone except Danny's friends has been invited to a luncheon given by the family at an expensive caterers. The food is excellent, the conversation excruciatingly dull, partly because no one talks about the posthumous guest of honor whose most vividly remembered exploits would scandalize the clergy. As a special treat the bishop sings *Danny Boy*. Agatha, exultant, preens with self-satisfaction. A job not only well but magnificently done.

As Steve is driving home the sky lightens and the rain stops. Anne says, "The pardon came too late."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning the Sacred Heart promised Aggie's friend, Sister Elizabeth, it would be a bright clear day. She has a great devotion to him and says he never



refuses a favor. She put his statue looking out her window at the convent and said a special prayer. She was so mad when she saw what the weather might be like she made him stand on the outside ledge."

"Tough love."

"He'd made a fool out of her in front of all her friends."

"Why not the Sacred Liver?" Steve asks. "The Sacred Spleen? What's so sacred about the heart?"

A few mornings later Steve leaves his office to meet with his brother Jack. Jack, in the middle of his second divorce, lives in a slightly rundown apartment house in center city. There are three television sets in the living room, each with its own VCR.

"I taped *My Fair Lady* and the *Milkado* yesterday," he says, reminding his "pseudo- intellectual" (one of his favorite words) brother that you don't have to go to college to be cultured. His face is mottled and his hands are unsteady as he buttons his suit coat. He looks natty in a light beige suit and a color coordinated pale gold shirt and tie.

"I'm glad you could take time off."

"Anything for a free lunch. Those bastards won't miss me. They're glad to see me go."

It's a short walk to the restaurant, which has not yet begun to serve lunch. They go to the bar in the shadowy room adjacent to the main dining room. The bartender is busy arranging glasses and bottles on shelves behind the bar.

"I'll have a very tall beer," Jack says, "and maybe a very short shot with it."

The bartender, a bored looking young man, barely glances at him. "The bar doesn't open until eleven-thirty."

"Twenty minutes," Jack says. "Hey! I have an idea. Why don't we have a drink while we're waiting?"

Steve laughs and the bartender turns away.

Jack says, "I don't like this place. They're not high class, they just *think* they're high class."

Another favorite comment of his, Steve remembers, and remembers, too, that he's ill at ease in restaurants like this and that his taste in food is pretty much limited to steak, hot dogs and hamburgers.

"We don't have to eat in the big room, Jack. They serve some meals in here. Like salads."

He laughs when Jack looks appalled.

"Don't scare me like that." Looking at his watch. "The curfew is over."

They sit at a table near the bar and order small steaks from a waiter who speaks as if he's auditioning for a Noel Coward comedy.

Jack says, "Let's begin by considering our conversation about money over. Save your breath." Gulping down a therapeutic beer, he orders another.

"I told Pappy I'd get you to come see him so you can settle this thing face to face."

"There's nothing to settle." This in his "aristocratic" voice.

"Not just the money, Jack. He'd welcome any excuse to see you. He misses you."

Looking at Jack's self-consciously aloof face, the half closed eyes and tilted chin, Steve thinks, And I miss what you were—the childhood companion, the

bright friendly young man. What social evolution created the pompous, ill-humored adult?

"I'm under a lot of pressure," Jack says, and tells Steve a long story about a black subordinate who, after Jack's detailed criticism, said, "Go to hell, old man. Why don't you give us a break and retire?"

"I could have had him summarily dismissed for using language like that to a superior. Summarily dismissed. More and more I have to put up with that sort of crap. Then, of course, there's the divorce."

"How is Bunny?"

"She gave up drinking then kept nagging me every time I had a few. She told me to cut down or she'd leave."

"Are you still in touch?"

"Now and then. I really want her back." Man-of-the-world smile. "I want her front, too."

"How about a week from today?"

"Huh?"

"The nursing home a week from today. I'll pick you up." The voice of authority. A big brother voice.

Jack nods and orders another beer.

When, the following week, they come into his room, Tim brightens at the sight of Jack. He's sitting by the bed on a straight chair, a smiling sovereign, the chair a throne, the cane he clutches a staff.

"I brought you some cookies, you old devil," Jack says and ruffles Tim's hair. "Not that you deserve them."

"You probably stole them from another room, depriving some poor creature of the only pleasure he has."

"You know too much," Jack growls and, making his finger a pistol, aims at Tim, who laughs in delight.

Steve says, "Do you think we should stay here or go someplace where we won't be interrupted?"

"Jim's in the hospital," Tim says. "He's been shitting blood."

"We might as well get this over with," Jack says.

Steve takes a small tape recorder from his coat pocket and turns it on. "Just so we don't have any misunderstanding." Then to Tim, "Did you give Jack the five thousand or lend it to him?"

"Six thousand."

Jack looks at Steve and lowers his head and voice. "Five."

"Pappy, did you expect to get it back?"

"Well, you know, after all, my own son, I never thought—"

"Fine," Steve says. "That clears it up."

"The hell it does! I lent him six thousand and I want it back."

Jack shouts, "Five!"

"Six! Five to fix up the kitchen and nine hundred for the new furnace."

Jack looks startled. "I forgot that."

"You tell her. You tell her I said you have to give it back. You're my son and it's my money."

Steve turns off the tape recorder and Jack says, "I refuse to discuss this matter any further," in a voice that invites murder, and, as they leave, Tim looks ready to accept the invitation.

Driving Jack home, Steve says, "He may sue you he's that mad."

"A lot of good it will do him."

"I don't know about that. It could come up in court *before* he dies."

Curiously enough, two weeks later, Jack mails their father a check for nine hundred dollars. Steve, at Tim's request, has talked to his lawyer, who tells him, "There'd be no trouble winning the suit. We have a lot of geriatric judges who don't look kindly on children stealing from their parents. The trouble is a case like this could come down as either civil or criminal, depending upon what the court decides. You want your brother to go to jail?"

Although he has doubts about the lawyer's opinion, Steve decides not to sue, especially because Tim thinks the nine-hundred dollar check may be a first installment, and because he suspects Jack is right and the old man won't live long enough to collect the money.

When Steve visits again, Tim is sitting propped up in the hospital bed. Jim Flaherty hasn't returned.

"The old legs have gone out on me," he says. "One of the nuns told me she's been praying I wouldn't have to use the cane anymore and, by God!, wasn't her prayer answered? Piety's a grand thing."

"No substitute for it."

"I'd will you the cane but I don't know what happened to it. Too bad I can't leave you my hair."

"It looks like it would be hell to comb," Steve says. "Besides it's a little too early to be talking about bequests."

"God, I hope not. What the hell good am I? I can't hear, the cataracts make it impossible to read, and now I can't walk. I'm more than ready to cash it in."

As Steve gets ready to leave, Tim says, "Tell Anne to come see me, and your kids if they're in town. Jack's kids, too. And Jack. Don't forget to tell Jack."

Sister Agatha, who's standing across the hall opposite Tim's room, signals to Steve.

"Steven, this is very important. The administrator wants to see you."

"A mix-up in the bill?"

Agatha doesn't answer and Steve walks to the office, which is down the hall next to the visitors lounge. He opens the door and stops. There are three people in the room. The administrator, Mr. Perry, tall, thin, quiet spoken, sits behind his desk facing the head nurse, a red faced woman in her forties. They both seem slightly embarrassed. There's an empty chair between the nurse and a plump old man, sitting to her right and wearing what Steve thinks is a perennially pleasant expression fixed on a round babyish face.

Perry gestures to the empty chair and Steve sits down. "Are you conducting a trial?"

Perry looks uncomfortable and the baby faced old man chuckles. "Hardly." He extends his hand. "I'm Doctor Rogers. You know, of course, what's wrong with your father."

"Of course. He has a painless, slow moving cancer that now affects the bones of his legs."

"We've been going over his case and we thought we'd like to get some additional information."

"About what?"

"About the suitability of treatment."

Steve looks over at Perry. "Are we talking about hospitalization? I thought you said he could be taken care of here."

"That's perfectly true," Rogers says. "He's not suffering and the treatment has been, really, to let well enough alone. It's entirely palliative."

"What information do you need?"

"We're sure that in the weeks to come he'll undergo a marked diminution of consciousness."

"So?"

"That means you'll be making any necessary decisions for him."

"Or unmaking them," the nurse says, and Rogers frowns.

"I don't understand."

"He's talking about a blood transfusion," the nurse says sharply.

"It's not as if I'm proposing anything drastic," the doctor says. "It's a routine procedure but in his case it can make the difference between life and death."

"We've been through that, Doctor. My father signed a paper stating specifically that he refused to have one. He's been through it before. They can't do it here. They hauled him in an ambulance to some hospital, a very painful trip for him, put him through long and uncomfortable procedure, then drove him back here. Now you'll want to do that again? And for what? So he can stay alive an extra few months?"

"It might be an extra four or five. What right do you have to deprive him of life?"

"Why should I prolong his death, especially against his own wishes?"

The old doctor looks frightened, as if he's gazing at his own death. His voice becomes shrill.

"You don't know. You can't know. Nobody can. They say that young TV actor has only a few months left, but a new cure could come along any day."

"This is crazy. I can't listen to this."

"He could live a long rich life."

Steve takes out his wallet. "For how much? How much will you bet? Any odds."

Dr. Rogers' face is flushed and his mouth trembles. "It's a question of morality. How can you live with yourself if you kill your father?"

Steve surges out of his chair, grabs the old doctor's shirt front and puts his face inches from his. "Fuck you!"

He slowly relaxes his grip, leaves the office and goes across the hall to the men's room. He puts down the lid of a toilet and sits, his face in his hands. His mind is a blank as the sky. Scattered images begin to appear and fade and he seems to become one with the rain splashed mourners at the cemetery, the desperately dancing child, his father filling his pipe, and small Stevie and his little brother playing "Navy Guys" (a favorite cousin's a sailor) in the backyard of their old, now destroyed house, and he feels not grief but sadness and traces of remembered love. Surprised to find his cheeks and hands wet, he goes to a basin and as he throws water on his face he hears a silvery tenor voice raised in song.

"I'd go a long way to tickle Mary. I'd go a long way from home."

He passes Singer Smith in the hallway and leaves the building to see the old doctor waiting for him on the front steps.

"I want to tell you something," the doctor says. "I think we should have lunch together sometime. I think if we had lunch you would like me."

"I probably would, I probably would," Steve says and walks toward the parking lot.



NANCY RIGGAN

## Warning Ticket

You're a mud-tracking husband,  
 raised not to care,  
 or blissfully unaware of your droppings  
 on a just-scrubbed floor. There's more.  
 You're a shirt-shucking husband,  
 certain that someone will pick up  
 what you let fall. And that's not all.  
 You're a mirror-spraying husband,  
 whose teeth must be viewed when brushed,  
 as though bending over the sink  
 would debase. There's another case.  
 You're a plate-leaving husband,  
 who, once the food is gone, finds  
 no wish for the dish, but assumes  
 its return to the cupboard, clean  
 through sleight-of-hand. Let's understand.  
 I'm a knife-wielding wife, sick  
 to death of your slobbish persona,  
 honing the blade as your list  
 of offenses mounts. Neatness counts.

RICHARD LUFTIG

## The Old Couple

The old couple down the road  
do not tan in the August sun.  
Instead, they stroke  
the napes of cats curled in circles  
in their laps in shaded lawn  
chair rockers that kick their legs  
as in synchronous dance.  
They follow the shade around  
the yard like sundials,  
heat tugging at their heels,  
while afternoon forces their backs  
against the bricks until at last  
at 3 they move inside to count  
the time by naps and soaps  
and yesterday's leftover meals.  
Sometimes, if the morning is cool  
they weed flowers in a clandestine  
garden with spades and trowels  
that well-meaning children  
have forbidden them to use.  
If visitors call, they sit  
in the parlor happy to haul  
out shoe boxes weighted  
with letters and photos  
foxed and cracked at the edges.  
Later, the threat of night  
encircles the house as they bask  
in the flickering light of a kitchen TV.

At 9 they go to the heart  
of the house, checking locks  
and pulses and laying their day  
by the night stand with her  
glasses and his hearing aid.  
One will have to hear for two  
while two will dream as one  
alone. They sleep like flowers  
closing up for the night  
until morning comes.  
Then lingering in bed as long  
as they might, they grip  
the hollow of the day,  
donning familiar eyes and ears,  
and warming fresh milk  
to feed the cats.

ANN MAUREEN GALLAGHER, IHM

## One More Try...

Crossing the Kidron valley, it occurred to him: "One more miracle might make them see; might make the difference with the crowning—thorns or not.

It stole into his mind much like a practiced thief and lurked there subtly in the shadows. The merest lifting of a finger, or focusing, alone, would raise the trees from roots; turn dust to blood—or water.

It might be just... this they needed. One small shifting of the universe; and then they'd see the Who *I AM* whose love for them stirs deeper than the rumblings of the earth; the roar of the skies. Turn

dark to dawn? With ease, he thought. May be he didn't do, reach out, go far enough so they might recognize his coming. So he would work that one-more-sign that they might *know* at last. But in the moment, lingered, there were lips

moist against his cheek, the scratch of beard, and Judas' hand upon his arm; the hiss at last of *recognition*.



A Story by  
TERRY GRANT

## Liver

The old man leaned forward against the dining room table and steadied himself with his left hand. The fork in his right hand quivered above his plate as if deciding on its own what his next bite would be. It made him think of how his body was getting away from him, surprising him with some of the things it did.

"Your pee ever come out all yellow and foamy?" he said. He intended this for his son-in-law, Raymond, but Clarissa and the two boys turned too. "Say, Raymond?" Raymond's face, the hairline receding on either side of the forehead, reminded him of a big, heart-shaped balloon.

"Not that I recall," Raymond said.

"Daddy, not now, please."

"Boy, mine does. Burns like hell, too."

"Oh, God."

"Think it's my liver."

Clarissa placed her own fork deliberately beside her plate and leaned across the table toward the old man as though with great care. "Your liver's got nothing to do with your urine," she said. "Now, can't this wait?"

"Sure it does," he said. "Course it does." He rested his forehead against his palm, letting his fingers slip into his thin gray hair, and wondered why he was never sure of himself in this house the way he had been in his own. He'd never had any doubts there, in the big, white two-story with *Bud Davis* painted on the mailbox; and his body had been dependable. But that was years ago. The house was not even his anymore. "Think I don't know my own body?"

Clarissa didn't answer him, so he started to repeat himself, then saw the lines that ran down from the corner of her mouth deepen as she pressed her lips together—an expression she used when she had been overcharged at the supermarket, or when the light bill suddenly jumped ten dollars and he thought that maybe she believed it unfair that he had come to live with her instead of one of the other children.

He forked at a chunk of meat on his plate, trying to remember what Clarissa had called this particular dish. It was just beef, but she had done something to it that made it tangy. (The first time he'd had it, he had said, *What'd you do, rub a lemon all over it? Whose bright idea was that?* And after that she had asked him what he wanted for dinner—anything he wanted—and he said he'd really like to have meat loaf, and she said, *How about ham? You've always liked ham.*) He didn't know the name of the dish because he wouldn't admit to Clarissa that he liked it. He chewed twice then spat the meat back onto his plate.

"Ah, hell," he said, trying to stand. The chair didn't slide back, and his thighs caught on the table, forcing him back down. He shoved himself away, almost tipping over backwards, then stood quickly and went into the living room.

He let himself fall into the brown vinyl recliner, then pressed back against it to get the leg rest up. It didn't budge, leaving him flat against the chair back, gripping the arm rests tightly. He gave up and stared straight ahead. The room bothered him somehow, but it was probably just that the couch and chairs all faced the television. He could not see his face in the dark, green screen but could see the outline of the window behind him and the dark shape of the chair he was sitting in and, just before that, a vague difference in the shadowy reflection which must have been his own form but which appeared to him as formless. He turned his head away and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again the screen was bright with colors and shifting images, and the boys were sitting on the floor in front of it. Robert, the oldest, turned and said something to him, but for several seconds he heard nothing. Then the words ("We're not bothering you, are we?") and the loud nearly-tangible music rattled in his ear as though the eardrum had come loose.

So, *this is it*, he thought, remembering his own grandfather suddenly arising from the breakfast table to announce that he couldn't hear a damn thing. It surprised him now to learn that ears didn't just stop working but broke down gradually, like everything else.

He focused on the boys, tried to take in every detail in case his eyesight went too. Their short bristly hair appeared so distinct he could almost count the individual hairs; but otherwise they were just two thin teenage boys, no different from the ones he saw in cars or the grocery store or the mall.

Robert shrugged at Ted, and they turned back to the screen.

It was a struggle for him to get back up so soon; he had to grab the little square table for support. The round-based lamp on it came unbalanced, and he reached for it but didn't touch it, letting it wobble back into place.

After a moment he realized he was just standing there, his hand stretched toward the lamp, his feet not moving, not carrying him to the doorway. He lifted his right foot and pushed it forward, beginning to walk as if just remembering how. He went into the hallway and down it, concentrating on walking, on getting to the bathroom, ignoring the pictures along the walls—his children and grandchildren but also members of his son-in-law's family who had nothing to do with him.

Inside the white-and-beige bathroom he locked the door, unbuckled his belt and let his pants drop to his ankles, pushed his undershorts down to his knees, and sat on the cushioned toilet seat. Now he thought about the pictures, his children whose names he could not always remember. There were five of them—two sons and three daughters. Michael, William, Mary, Ellen, Clarissa. All normal names except Clarissa. (*Our one extravagance*, Alice had said. And he allowed her that because she had wanted to name one of the boys *Bud*, *Junior* and he'd said, *Hell, no.*)

Well, Clarissa had done that right; she'd given the boys normal names. Mary (whose married name was Sims or Simpson or something) had named her daughters Silvan and Fiona. He refused to use the names in conversation, but couldn't get them out of his head. (Mary's family had come to his house once, when Alice was still alive; and he'd said something about *one of the girls*, and

Mary said, *Which one?* He said, *The bigger one*, and she said, *Oh, you mean Silvan.* He didn't tell her, but he'd meant just what he'd said.)

He stood and checked the bowl. There was nothing but clear water, but he wiped anyway, not looking at the mirror directly in front of him because he knew he'd see a dour old man with his pants down, skin sagging from his bones and thinning muscles, eyes turning yellow from a failing liver.

There was a knock on the door as he was pulling his pants back up, and Clarissa's voice said, "Are you all right in there?"

He yanked the door open, said, "Can't even take a crap around here," and pushed past her, bumping the wall, causing one of the pictures to clatter onto the floor. He didn't wait to see who it was, but walked on down the hall and out the front door.

He stopped on the doorstep, his arms hanging stiffly, the sunlight pricking his eyes and melting the images together. He scanned old lady Duggan's front yard for the ten year-old mimosa, then thought to lift a hand above his eyes. There it was—an enormous tree, impossible to miss. And there was the ugly mold-green box-like house, the fractured concrete walk, the gaudy plastic flamingo jutting from the lawn.

He turned from the view and walked alongside his daughter's house, past the kitchen window where she probably stood staring at him. The garage door was up, so he went in and sank back against Raymond's brick-red sedan, one hand on the side-mirror, the other on the door handle. It irritated him when Raymond treated the car like a kitten, stroking it, cooing at it. His old Ford had lasted him twenty good years, but he'd never done that to it. He'd always just left it sitting in the driveway, sprayed the bird crap and leaves off occasionally.

He could hear his own raspy breathing, feel his heart pumping, but he pushed up from the car and went into the kitchen just to be away from the smell of exhaust and oil. No one was there after all. He moved over to the sink and looked out the front window, but there was no way to tell if Clarissa had been there, so he turned his back to it.

The kitchen was immaculate, not even a dirty dish in the sink. It seemed like Alice had been forever washing dishes or cleaning up after one of the kids, but all he'd ever seen Clarissa do was rinse off a plate and stick it in the dishwasher.

He wanted to rest a minute, but Raymond's keys on the phone stand and the thought of Clarissa coming in to glower at him like a grammar school teacher got him moving again. He took the keys, squeezing so they wouldn't rattle, went back into the garage, and opened the car door. He slid into the driver's seat, then eased the door to until the overhead light went out. The last thing he needed was for Raymond to hear him. (When Raymond got mad his face would seem to expand and he would yell at Clarissa or the boys, but never directly at him, and at some point would say, *Well, he's not my dad.*)

It'd been years since he'd even been behind the wheel of a car, ever since he'd almost nodded off one night coming home from the grocery store. It'd scared Clarissa so badly she yelled at him for two hours, saying that the only reason he'd ever drive again was if he wanted to kill somebody. At the time all he could think of was, *Well, maybe I do*, so he hadn't said anything.

He slid the key into the ignition on the first try, rubbed his stiff unswollen knuckles, then grasped the wheel, thinking, *Like falling off a log.*

Through the rear window, the blacktop driveway seemed narrow, but he knew better. He'd seen two cars on it before with room to spare. And the mailbox was well off to the side; not a chance he'd back over it. (But wouldn't Clarissa love it if he did. She'd hound him to the grave over that.)

He started the car and backed it slowly down the driveway. As he neared the road it occurred to him that Raymond had surely heard and would come bursting through the garage door any second. He gave it more gas, cut sharply out into the road, and his door swung open. He reached for it and braked, was jerked sideways while the door bounced back and *chunked* shut.

He sat up, red-faced, not glancing around, put it in drive and drove quickly to the nearby stop sign. He peeked into the rear-view mirror, expecting Raymond's inflated face to come bobbing into view, but all he saw there was an empty street.

He took a left onto Dandruss Avenue. Since he'd stopped driving he had quit paying any attention to the roads, to how they connected, but he knew Dandruss led straight to Bender and from there it was easy.

A transfer truck rumbled by him in the opposite direction, and he drifted away from it, almost off the road. He pulled back toward the center but couldn't hold it there. "Hell," he said, glancing in the rear-view. He'd learned to drive as a teenager and, until now, had never had one skittish moment. (And Alice had always sat close to him, touching his upper arm, only a couple of times squeezing and saying, *Slow down a little, please.*)

The road came to an end, and he pulled up behind a small angular car. The four-lane street ahead appeared swollen with traffic, cars and trucks and vans pinched between two traffic lights. The green sign at the corner read, *Hirschbaum Blvd.* He'd never heard of it. He tried to look back up Dandruss, but his hands clung to the wheel like they'd grown around it. But he hadn't come the wrong way, he was sure of that; he'd been on this road any number of times and, at the very least, knew which direction was which.

When he turned back, the other car was gone so he edged up to the corner. The traffic surged by him for several seconds then swelled again when the lights turned red. He hunched forward from the pull of it. His gaze slid up to the convenience store across the street, the parking lot so big he couldn't miss it if he tried. He waited, but the traffic seemed denser than he'd ever seen it and he couldn't quite take in all four lanes at once. Then the spaces between cars took shape. A wide path began to form, and a half-second later it was there. He accelerated, was a moment late, passed through the intersection braced for a collision, smoothly entered the parking lot and came to a stop thirty feet from the gas pumps. His body seemed not to notice; it wouldn't relax until he pried his hands from the wheel and said, "You act like you never drove before." His foot trembled for a moment then settled back onto the brake.

Thankfully, the blonde girl at the pumps paid no attention; she held the nozzle to the tank of her shimmery white sports car as though perfectly content, almost motionless, one tanned leg slightly ahead so that her skin-tight white dress had slid partway up her thigh. He raised a fist to thump the horn, but, seeing her dark glasses and tilt of her chin, thought that the sudden noise might cause her to bolt.

He reached across the passenger seat to roll the window down but found no handle, pulled his hand back, studied the door, reached back toward it, then realized that the window didn't crank at all but was worked with a button below his left elbow. He pressed it and heard the electric hum of the window going down, felt the gentle vibration through his fingertip. By the time he looked out, the girl had finished and was already halfway to the store. She went in and vanished, but he quickly found her again, a bright blurry shape moving through the dim interior. A few minutes later she came back out, walking straight toward him, looking somewhere out past him, and his heartbeat thickened as though with an echo. He bent as far as he could toward the open window, but she didn't even glance at him. "Where's Bender?" he said loudly.

She stiffened and looked his way, though still not quite at him, and he thought, *If she says, Who's Bender, I swear I'll slap her.* The corner of her lip curled in, and a faint crease appeared above the bridge of her nose. Then, with a backhanded wave, she seemed to shoo him back the way he had come and said slowly, as if to a child, "You go right over there to Dandruss Avenue. Take the first right...you can't miss it...big green sign on the corner."

His cheeks went hot like he'd been slapped, and the car began to inch forward. He sat up and got his foot back on the brake. When he looked again she was sitting in her car, twisted away from him toward the passenger side, one long smooth leg still stretched out the open door. She seemed to be adjusting something, but he couldn't see past her. He let the car roll again, and as the thing came into view, something feathery brushed across the pit of his stomach. He stared into her car at the shapeless mass, felt his neck craning forward, kept working at it until one pointy edge became the corner of a blanket, and he thought of dirty clothes in a basket, but knew at once that that wasn't it. He saw the little hand reach up to the girl's downturned face, the arm that seemed as soft as a pillow, the pudgy little face with huge blonde-lashed blue eyes and soft full mouth. The door closed, the tinted window shutting him out, and he blinked, startled not only by the sight but by how clearly he had seen it. He tried to imagine the girl pregnant (like Alice, who would swell as if her skin were made of rubber, water pooling in her face and breasts, around her hips, in her feet and ankles and especially her stomach), but he couldn't make the taut skin expand.

She drove away, and, reflexively, he followed. The car seemed lighter, so he let it be drawn out onto the side road then immediately onto Hirschbaum, where the traffic was suspended as if awaiting his return. He jerked free and swung back up Dandruss, took the first right without reading the little green sign. He rolled past two blocks of unfamiliar houses, driveways all paved instead of gravel, the road too smooth where there should've been potholes, then turned left and slowed to a crawl.

He nodded at Al Potter's old place (just like he remembered except for the wide front porch and the two-car garage and its own freshly-paved driveway), sneered at the dark green house across from Al's (which had always been brown before and more squat and compacted, but he could still picture Kendrick sprawled half-drunk across the front steps and his smart-mouthed boys racing their engines so loud it would rattle the dishes in houses two blocks away).

He crept up to the third house on the right, stopped and cut off the engine, then shut his eyes. His hands let go of the wheel and dropped to his lap, head slowly drifted back against the padded head rest. He listened for any recognizable sound—the Wilson's dogs yapping their heads off, packs of mouthy teenage boys, the kids on the dusty old swing out back—but could only hear his own irregular breathing. He drew a deep ragged breath which rattled down his throat and scraped along the inside of his chest, held it for a few seconds then let it go. He let his body breathe on its own, waited for it to suddenly forget how, thinking that that must be how it happens, but it didn't let up at all.

He opened his eyes and looked first at the mailbox. It was twice as big as his—a miniature clay-colored barn with *The McClarys* burned into the roof. The lawn (which he'd liked to let grow calf-high so he could cool his achy feet in the dew, and wouldn't cut until Alice threatened to do it herself) was short and stiff and the sickly green color of a week-old bruise. His gaze wandered over it, turned and followed the wine polished-stone walkway, but couldn't get through the huge ornate door, skirted the large picture window (and the shadowy faces peering out), then blundered into the impossible mosaic of brown and red brick, still searching for that tall white image which he had already forgotten.



JoAnne Growney

## Snowbound

Snowbound is that other world  
in which no schedules sit  
and no ambitions flare  
to interrupt my satisfaction with  
the bluest sky and whitest field  
and coldest air.

PETER MUNRO

## Open

One act unstills the wind in the marrow.  
Light spills its secrets. Wind and light  
hiss a name I love through frail leaves;  
  
the veins of each battered leaf are bones  
in the fingers of each of my hands and the name  
is my own. I falter. But my hands have faith,  
  
they know how to touch when my heart does not.  
They know how to take the wind and clasp  
the fire so that many names stream loudly  
  
and in silence through the hairs on your body.  
Speechless, I stare at these other names  
and this other light wreathing your head  
  
like a crown of prayers. Bones in my fingers  
are already filled with wind but I reach  
to clasp yours and Fire becomes merely flame  
  
and ash and I see that even this faith of hands  
can be misused; wind in the marrow stills  
until I open fingers and spill Light.

KEVIN PRUFER

## The Underwater Tunnel

This warm lake swallows us. You say  
the water tastes of rust. Again,  
it is the lake, bottomless

for all I know. Our breaths  
come heavy and near.  
We kick to stay afloat;

when your leg brushes mine  
you apologize. When your leg—  
how my mind loses its way

in all of this: In Mexico,  
beneath a different lake,  
scientists have discovered a tunnel

that winds, water-filled, daedel,  
for miles beneath the arid landscape.  
They don't even know

where the tunnel leads! Divers  
have entered it, lost their way,  
their oxygen tanks emptying

to nothing. And you, here,  
your legs wrapped in this warmth—  
open-mouthed, wet labyrinth—

your legs almost wrapping  
around my own, when your leg—  
the lake swallows us both.



A Story by  
THOMAS E. KENNEDY

## *Color of Darkness, Color of Night*

Randolph Smith walked home from the station through the crisp, clear winter night. November was at its full. Leaves skittered along the pavement, piling in drifts against fences and gutterstones, and the wind smelt of apple and an agreeable edge of death. He turned and climbed the hill toward his house, tired from another day of quibbling and jockeying at the office. He knew exactly what he wanted to do. Sandra would be driving in to Lincoln Center to see something at the Beaumont with her sister, and he knew exactly how he would use his night for himself. There was a bottle of beaujolais in the cupboard, a frozen baguette, salad, chicken, a bottle of Jack Daniels. He'd grill the chicken, play with his little girl, sing her a couple of songs and have her to sleep in time for the Bogey film on Channel Nine, during which he intended to drink bourbon and eat peanuts to his heart's content. *Screw the office.* Up above the crest of the hill, the arch of the big dipper sparkled across the clean, black, wind-swept sky. It seemed odd to see stars here, where tall silver-painted streetlamps stained the darkness an unnatural pink.

In the house, he braced himself for the boisterous greetings of his little girl, but nothing happened. He shed briefcase, topcoat, and necktie, poured himself a bourbon, unlaced his shoes, popped a bunch of peanuts into his mouth. The house was quiet. Munching the peanuts, he wandered through the ground floor rooms, then up the stairs.

Sandra was in their bedroom, paused over a half-packed white-canvas shoulder bag. She wore pressed denims and a loose, fuzzy lavender sweater which concealed her pregnancy. A blotch of lavender lipstick was smeared on one front tooth. Little Elizabeth, who would be four in February, dressed in blue corduroy overalls, lay on her elbow on the bedspread, picking at a pompon. Her mouth was sad. Sandra, who had been staring at the little girl, looked up at Smith. "I better call Claire and cancel," she said.

"Nonsense," Smith said. "Why? Claire would never forgive you."

"I'm afraid Elizabeth is coming down with something."

Smith crouched before his daughter. "Hi, Lizzie." She turned to him, smiled with closed lips. Her face was pale, her brown eyes open, but distant. "Did you come home to me, Daddy?"

"You bet I did," Smith said and took her hand. It was cold. He laid his palm on her brow. "She's not even warm. I can manage. You go to your play and sit up and gab all night with Claire. You need it."

"You really think so?"

"I insist."

Sandra wedged a spray can of deodorant into the bag, a jar of cream, some folded underwear. She zipped the bag shut. "There's a grilled chicken there for you. And salad in the fridge." She held out her arms. "Like my new sweater?"

"Nice," he said. And: "You got lipstick on your tooth."

Elizabeth wouldn't eat any chicken and wouldn't finish her milk. He decided not to bathe her so as not to risk a chill in case she *were* ill. He was looking forward to setting himself up in the living room with the Jack Daniels and ice bucket, peanuts, Pall Malls, *Newsweek*, TV listings, the leather-scrap footstool. He dressed Elizabeth in a flannel nightgown printed with tiny red and blue flowers and helped her into her red terry bathrobe. With the hood up she looked like a chubby, tiny dwarf. "Okay," he said. "Let's brush em."

To get to the bathroom, they had to cross through his and Sandra's bedroom. Elizabeth balked on the doorjamb, her tiny soft hand clutching his. "It's too dark in there, Daddy."

He could just have flipped the light switch, but he wanted to teach her not to be afraid. "Darkness is nothing, Liz. Everything is just the same in the dark as in the light."

She leaned into his leg, hugging it. "I'm scared, Daddy. It's too dark in there."

He switched on the light. "Look," he said, "See how it all is? See the bed and the lamp and the dresser?" He turned off the light, counted aloud to five, then flicked it on again. "See? Nothing's changed." And turned it off again.

She clung to his leg, turning her eyes away from the room. "I'm scared, Daddy," she said quietly. "Please turn the light on for me. See how cold it makes me?"

He hesitated, not wanting to give in, but then suddenly saw, or felt he saw, the darkness through her eyes. The hair on his arms prickled. He flicked the switch again, and the soft glow of the overhead lamp washed into the room.

While Elizabeth scrubbed her teeth, he found himself staring absently at a black spot on a white garment on top of the laundry hamper. The spot was moving. He looked closer and saw it was a spider, feeding off what appeared to be a smudge of blood on one of Elizabeth's tee shirts. His shadow fell across the insect, and it began to flee, but he trapped and squashed it in a fold of the shirt, saw its blood mingle with his daughter's on the white cotton.

Barefoot on the black-and-white tile floor, Elizabeth was shivering. "I'm cold, Daddy," she said. "I'm cold as snow." He bundled her up in his arms and carried her out to the crib, plugged the plastic clownface nightlight into the baseboard beside her play table. Then he sang a song she liked about the north wind: *I don't know, but I been been told/ That old north wind blows chilly and cold:/ Had a little girl, but she left me. / Had a little girl, but she left me...*

"Is it me, Daddy?"

This was the ritual. "Of course, not, sweetheart. You're right here with me."

"Sing, Daddy."

As he stood there, drowsy, singing in a flattish whisper, looking down at her in the dapple of light that fell across her quilt, he wondered what was in her mind.

"Daddy?" she asked. "What color is darkness?"

"No color at all sweetheart."

"What color is night?"

"None at all, love," he whispered and began softly to sing her favorite song, "Mr. Blue." Her brown eyes sparkled in the dim light. Then her eyelids began to droop, fluttering lightly as they closed, flecked with minuscule purple capillaries. He leaned down and gently cupped her face in his palms. Her cheeks were very warm, and her face seemed disembodied in the dark cup of

his hands, the light of her white skin glowing faintly. If she were taken from him, it would be like hacking off a chunk of his body. He remembered, when he was a child, how the knowledge that his mother could die sometimes visited him and brought with it breathless terror. Yet now his mother was dead, and this little girl whom he so cherished would no doubt grow from him as he had grown from the woman and the man who had given him life, until at last, but for the reflections of memory, they were strangers.

In the living room, he sat down with a fresh bourbon and the newspaper in his armchair in a circle of yellow lamplight to take a breather before setting himself up for an evening of solitary pleasure. He read about Lebanon and Grenada and the arms limitation talks. He read a story about a man in Libya whose hand had been chopped off because he stole a bag of grain, and another about an earthquake in Turkey. The earthquake story was accompanied by a photograph of a peasant woman on her knees, arms raised over the body of a child lying in the rubble, face lifeless. He studied the picture closely, with an uncomfortable fascination; the child was no older than Elizabeth. Its face might have been asleep, but no, it was dead, you could see it was dead.

He lowered the newspaper to his lap and leaned back in his chair. He dozed, dreamt about a bloody wrist separated from its hand, woke with a start to the sound of wind rattling the storm windows. He read a review of a book about an island that was disappearing into the sea, then turned to the weather report: a storm was due in from the north. He looked at the television listings to reconfirm that Bogey would be on later. Getting up to stretch, he wandered to the window. The sky was dark. A roil of navy blue clouds was moving slowly toward the blurred moon, and the bushes and willow trees twitched in the wind. He thought about Sandra, who would be sitting in the dark now watching Jason Robards on the stage of the Beaumont, her stomach swollen with the new baby. *Are you going to have it? It. Creature from beyond.* He tried to imagine what the child would be like, but could not. It occurred to him that he had yet to see either of his own brother's children. They lived so far away and so much had changed over the years.

He heard a cry. Listened and heard it again and hurried up the stairs to his little girl's room. She was sitting up in her crib in the dark. Her shoulders twitched, and vomit gushed from her mouth, down the front of her nightgown and quilt.

"Oh, no," he said. "Oh, dear. Don't worry, Lizzie, don't worry now." And carried her at arm's length down the hall to the bathroom. Carefully he peeled off the nightgown and dropped it into the tub, then sat her on the little plastic potty and wet a washcloth and sponged her face and her hair.

She said, "I threw up in my bed, Daddy," with the enthusiasm and relief that follows nausea.

He gave her a little picture book titled *Farm Animals* and filled a bucket with cold water and *Mr. Clean* and returned to her room. Her blanket and sheets and the carpet beside her crib were patched with splotched of vomit. He gagged, retreated, stood in the hall, swallowing, his eyes watering, looking toward the lighted bedroom. He thought of a bourbon, a cigarette, hot cigarette smoke cauterizing his nose and throat.

Had to be done.

Moving quickly, he stripped the crib, balled up sheets and blanket and carried them to the bathtub. Elizabeth looked up from her picture book at him. "I threw up in my bed, Daddy," she said enthusiastically. He looked at her pale face, her pale pudgy naked body on the orange potty seat, her delicate little ears and nose and feet, her narrow, vulnerable ribcage.

"It's okay, darling," he said. "We'll fix it up for you again."

On his knees on the dark brown carpet in her room, he sponged with a rag, wrung it out in the bucket, sponged again, and the sharp smell of *Mr. Clean* began slowly to overpower the vomit stench. He became aware, as he worked, of the sound of rain striking the window, like flung pellets of rice. He got up and opened the window, and cold air gushed in. The wind was rocking the trees and hedges, and rain sketched down the black night through the lights from the neighbor's windows.

She shivered as he dressed her in a clean pair of pajamas, dark blue patterned with yellow stars and crescent moons, and laid her on her side on the crisp white sheets and covered her with a blue woolen blanket. He placed a plastic bucket on the floor beside her and lowered the side of the crib and tucked towels around and under her. "If you have to get sick again, sweetheart, try to do it in the bucket, okay?"

She nodded and turned on her back, and her eyelids drooped. He tipped her onto her side again, but she whimpered and returned to her back. Her face was pale and luminous as moonlight in the dark room, and in the nightlight's glow he could discern purple bruise-like patches on her eyelids and around her eyes. Her brow was very warm. He stood there, worrying that on her back like that, she might strangle on her own vomit. He had heard that you could inhale it and choke to death, wondered if it were true. He had heard that, right after he was born, his mother had been so ill she had narrowly avoided strangling on her own vomit only because a cleaning lady happened to be there and was quick enough to turn her on her side. The doctor had commended the cleaning lady and told his mother, "This lady saved your life."

Smith wondered if that were just some exaggerated family story. He stood there watching his little girl, so still in sleep, so pale, while the rain clicked against the window glass and his throat ached for the pleasure of cigarette smoke. Surely she would wake, automatically, by reflex, and turn her face. Surely that was a natural, automatic reaction when throwing up.

Downstairs in the living room, he stood by the big triptych window, smoking and sipping a bourbon in a rock glass. The wind had turned violent; trees and bushes trembled and bent in its force, whipped brutally this way and that, and sheets of rain curled and shattered in the shiftings of its currents.

Overhead the black vault of the sky went white with lightening and, a moment later, thunder broke across the hill. The house reverberated with the clap, and behind him, the lamp went out. The streetlights were out, too. And the lights in the neighboring houses.

He turned his back to the window and peered into the darkness of the living room, looked toward where the stairs would be, the basement door. The only light was the pale red coal of his cigarette, vanishing into the sleeve of its own ash.

A sheet of rain cracked against the window so the casement bumped in its frame.

In the basement, by candlelight, he found that the fuses were all okay. A label on the fuse box showed a telephone number to call in case of power failure. He blessed Sandra's efficiency and memorized the number, but in the dark living room again, the telephone receiver was a dead thing in his hand. No sound whatsoever came from it. Punching the buttons on the cradle produced only the lifeless squeak of a spring and friction of plastic on plastic. The thing was just dead, worthless as the husk of an insect.

He heard gagging and hurried, stumbling, up the stairs. In the candlelight, he saw her on her back, vomit boiling up from her mouth, some of it sinking back. He grabbed and turned her and the vomit splattered into the bucket.

"No, more, Daddy," she whimpered. "Please make it stop."

This time he didn't dare leave her. He sat in a straightback chair beside the crib, his nose full of the smell of detergent and melted wax. Outside, the storm grumbled and clicked. Elizabeth was sleeping again, still on her back, her small, pale, luminous face uncomfortably still. To cool her, he had folded a damp washcloth across her forehead and had covered her only with a sheet, a cool starched white sheet which glowed in the dark room like her heart-shaped face.

It was past one. He nodded in his chair, allowed his eyes to close just for a moment: in the elongated oval glow on the ceiling above the spired flame of the candle, he noticed a large black spider. In fact, it was obscenely large, large as his own hand, with legs thick as fingers. Its mouth was distinct, black and wet, pulsing. In fact, there were two of them; no, more, many more. He shuddered. They were on the wall and floor as well.

He opened his eyes and vomit was bubbling and sucking over Elizabeth's mouth again. He lunged to turn her and get her face over the bucket.

He took a cigarette break downstairs in the living room, switched on the radio, only to be reminded by its unresponding silence that the electricity was still out. He leaned on the window ledge, so close that he could feel the chill off the glass. Raindrops beaded and streaked outside the storm window, but the wind had quieted. The long, slender, hanging branches of the willow stirred only faintly, as if buoyed on a slow stream, and all of the world, for as far as he could see, was without light, dark shapes hunched against the dark sky.

He thought about Sandra, wondered whether Manhattan was blacked out, too, whether she and Claire had got back to Claire's apartment in time, in safety. He picked up the phone, remembered it was out, put it down again. He chewed the skin on the side of his thumb. He could do nothing. He could not reach her.

Upstairs in Elizabeth's room, he sat again on the straightback chair, watching her.

He could see himself in her face, could see his mother even. Last year, when his mother died, he had visited her with Elizabeth one afternoon, and his mother had cried out in alarm, "Baby Lee! Why I thought it was Baby Lee. She looks just like her. My little sister. I can remember clear as day once, she was sitting on the kitchen table while my mother tied her shoe for her. She was eating an apple when I came in, and she held it out to give to me and smiled so shyly, wanting to give it to me." Mrs. Smith had looked at her son then, astonished. "She died that winter. She was only three. Got pneumonia,

delirious, singing. 'Oh I had a little nigger, and it wouldn't grow no bigger...' She didn't mean bad by it. We never used that word."

Tears had welled up onto the old lady's red eyelids, and she sobbed, once, loudly, and was visibly startled by the sound. "How silly," she whispered, scolding herself, her voice full of gravel. "After all these years. Why it's sixty years ago! How silly to cry."

That had been the first time Smith had even seen his mother cry, and it was the last time he ever saw her alive, the last story she had ever told him. From time to time, he thought about his mother and her little sister, himself and his little girl. He wondered what might have happened if his mother had died instead of her sister. He wondered how it could matter, this line of creatures, living and continuing itself and dying, from dark to dark.

The room was very still, his daughter's face so pale. He had a sense of himself there, sitting over her, at the core of all the darkness. In the dimness of the flickering candle, the unlit clownface nightlight seemed to leer. Smith's breath caught. His lips moved silently. He closed his eyes, opened them.

He would make tea and toast for her as soon as she woke. Crush an aspirin in a spoonful of the raspberry jelly she liked so much, prop her up with pillows, play games with her, tell her stories. He thought again about his mother and that last story she had told him, a stray incident that had taken place years before, passed on from his mother to himself just before she died, an indelible tiny image: the baby sister sitting on the kitchen table, holding out the apple, smiling the way his own little girl sometimes offered something, any old thing, a stone, a peanut, a gesture which in one so new to life seemed to prove that to give, to reach out and share was a natural thing.

The clownface nightlight came on again. The power was back. He thought about going down to telephone Sandra at Claire's apartment to make sure they were all right, that she and the new one in her womb were all right, but his daughter's small, pale face held him there; he wouldn't leave her alone, not yet, not until the morning light had filled the darkness of the room. He just wanted to see her eyes open first. He just wanted to see her smile.



WILLIAM WALDEN

## Legacy

As much diminished I would be  
 As fifty Adams torn from Eves  
 If I had never seen a tree  
 With sunlight dancing on its leaves.



ROBERT PARHAM

## Bent By Music

The body, bent by music to dispose itself to motion,  
is a supple creature, spent within the rhythms  
of someone else's conscious making, spurred  
along by pulse, by that which beats beyond the heart  
yet with it.

*What makes us dance?* someone  
other than Balanchine remarked, in asking makes  
the question poetry asks too: what moves us, then,  
to move at all?

I think it is the question  
with an answer. Then another. And another.  
But answers of the kind that make the dance,  
that make the music of the spheres, that count  
the syllables in precious sound, not abstract  
physics wrought within pretended frames  
of art and brave aesthetics.

No.

We move to more than to the maker,  
but the maker's motion is a key  
to one lock of the many on the door.



MATTHEW J. SPIRENG

## Your Death

Had we spoken of  
who should die first,  
I would have said I.

I do not mourn well.  
I do not carry  
your memory lightly.

It's not that I wish  
to die, but being left  
without you, with your  
memory a reminder  
of what has been  
between us, I discover  
how selfish I am,  
how I would rather  
it were you who  
were left mourning  
while I embraced  
whatever there is  
beyond the life we share.

SUSAN A. MANCHESTER

## Eastern Standard

Begin to fall forever back in one week's time  
 when time itself slides behind the lazy sun  
 when the sun loves shadows of leaves more  
 than fallen leaves themselves. Begin to fall back  
 back to dinner in frightened 5:00 pm darkness  
 the same darkness that brought father home  
 to a home in Camden where he staggered cold  
 from the dusk, cold from too many cigarettes, warm

from the beer, warm from the whiskey, or the wine  
 the wine which made his breath sour. Begin,  
 begin to find that lost hour when mother  
 told you, mother swore, he spoke that way  
 that slurring way, because he had a cold  
 because his cold made him wheeze, because  
 because. Begin to use that hour, when he wore  
 that red wool jacket, wore that black hat, to remember what  
 he looked like, what he sounded like: "I'm fi-i-ine!"

Begin.

"Re-e-eally!" Begin to add. "What's wrong with y-o-o-u?"

Begin.

Begin to add the hours, one hour for each year  
 each year more distant, and find only a day-and-a-half  
 missing.



## Book Marks

JOSEPH MEREDITH

### *Hunters' Moon*

St. Louis, MO: Time Being Press, 1994.  
122 pp. \$12.5 (Paper). \$18.95 (cloth).  
\$12.95 (cassette)

Reviewed by Paula Jayne White

Joseph Meredith does not write poetry. He talks to his reader—whispers really—as if the two of you are sharing a coffee during a lull at the office, or have ensconced yourselves on the last two stools at the neighborhood bar. And like office coffee or Michelob on tap, his volume *Hunter's Moon: Poems from Boyhood to Manhood* satisfies, not by being exotic or precious, but by being familiar, comforting, and just a little bitter.

A collection of poems spanning nearly fifteen years, *Hunter's Moon*, as (I suspect) does all good poetry, tells a love story, in this case the story of a man passionately in love with loving, and painfully aware that time steals love as well as youth. Often preoccupied with death—both literal and metaphoric—it is a volume haunted by ghosts, sometimes real ones: the poet's deceased father and mother, places from his past, the babies his grown children once were. (I suggest replacing Bill Cosby's *Fatherhood* as requisite reading for new fathers with four of Meredith's verses: "For Andrew at Three Months," "All Star," "The Age of Reason: For Emily at Seven," and "Midnight, Walking the Wakeful

Daughter"—handbooks for paternal love and loss.)

Throughout the volume, such ghosts haunt both speaker and reader. In "Perchance to Die?" for example, the speaker recounts a grotesque dream about "his father's face,/floating disembodied in the luminous dark" which returns from the dead to share his last words with his son: "no sound but a tiny linen scroll drops out./'You let me down' it read." And in poems like "Teaching Goldfish," "Thumper," and Hippel's Wilderness," Meredith literally raises the ghost of Philadelphia past, recreating the 1950s working class family, 1920s West Philadelphia, and turn-of-the-century Frankford.

Indeed, the strength of Meredith's work is its sense of place. Vividly, often painfully, recalling places he knows or once knew, the poems offer near-photographic accounts of these places that the reader can see, hear, and feel. "Belfield, October, Early Mornings" is the best of these. Invoking the painterly spirit of Charles Willson Peale, who once lived on this property, Meredith paints it for his reader with astounding accuracy and clarity: "the rusting hardwoods, bole and bough,/ the evergreens, still black." Using this poetic canvas as lamp, not mirror, Meredith moves the reader to share with him the poignant loss of a love as faded as the daytime moon that is the poem's subject: "I want to give you something of this dawn,/ these woods, this brilliant field, but you are gone."



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This faded love provides the theme that Meredith returns to again and again in *Hunter's Moon*, a theme that produces some of the most passionate works in this volume. In the titular (and closing) poem "Hunter's Moon, Jigg's Field, 1990," for instance, the speaker shares with his friend their mutual passion and loss for "the two women we love to death." "We are killing them," he writes. "They are killing us./ Day by day we love them and fail them./and die a little more either way." And in "April Fool," the poet offers a cautionary tale that can only bring tears. "Don't get caught," the poem warns, "wanting life too badly," while it offers a heartbreaking demonstration of what happens if you do. Addressing the speaker's lover, the poem concludes, "the pulse of you,/ so near in the darkness—/the urge so strong in me/ I whimper with desire—/ does not thrill me."

But Meredith's words do thrill, a thrill that is sometimes erotic—"I ride again the buoyant swells of our loving," sometimes technical—I marvel at Meredith's masterful control of formal verse disguising itself as free—and, often as not, painful. His description of a broken finger in "How It's Done" offers an accurate metaphor for describing the reader's experience of the volume: "the instant of humor before the pain,/ confirmed in brightness, settles in your teeth." And indeed the humor is there. It's hard to forget the image of a little girl shoving a maxipad down the sink ("The Age of Reason: For Emily at Seven"). It's hard not to laugh at his disparaging characterization of "poems that begin/ Looking wistfully at a photo" ("No Pictures,

Please"). And it's hard not to join the speaker in spitting one's lunch over the table as he recounts the practical jokes of "Pop's Pranks."

Yet if there is a criticism of *Hunter's Moon*, and surely there must be, it is that these instants of humor are so much more rare than the pain that settles in your teeth, as if the reader wants to join the woman of "Down to Earth" in pulling the poet back from his longing for death. "Why race for the grave? she accuses with exasperation and humor. "You have a lifetime yet./ The other will come soon enough." Like the woman, the reader hopes for the speaker to take her advice (but knows he probably won't). "Cling to my crevices,/ you big jerk," she teases. "I'll be earth;/ send your root down into me."

It is through seductive images like this one that Meredith most moves his reader's desire, either to be the kind of man who can capture love in language, or the kind of woman men write poems about. And if we are too frightened of the star-crossed husband-wife relationship in the book, Meredith offers us a world of women, teachers and students ("Grace," with its closing image "the shock of your remembered kiss," moves us to tears), daughter and mother, friends and lovers, all tenderly enshrined in the language of love. As we read the volume, we come to know these women, along with the rest of the ample cast of *Hunter's Moon*, as clearly as we know our own friends, lovers, and family. For all the pain in *Hunter's Moon*, there is also a deep solace, the solace of knowing these people, and of shar-



## Book Marks

ing the passion that keeps them (like their writer) alive.

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GEOFFREY C. WARD and  
KEN BURNS

### *Baseball: An Illustrated History.*

New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994. 486 pp.  
\$60.00

Reviewed by John P. Rossi.

*Baseball: An Illustrated History*, Ken Burns's sequel to his acclaimed Civil War series on Public Television fails to live up to expectations. Instead of a grand slam homer, Burns has hit a single.

The idea for a long documentary on the history of baseball seemed a natural one to Burns and his staff who were fascinated by the game's links to America's past, in particular its connection to the nation's racial crisis. Burns sees baseball, which has almost perfectly mirrored every development in American society and culture, as a microcosm for how the nation has changed over the past century and a half.

Dividing his text and film into nine innings, Burns and his co-author, Geoffrey C. Ward, the biographer of



*Jackie Robinson*

Franklin Roosevelt, examine baseball's history, always keeping in mind the racial division at the core of America's past. Perhaps for this reason the volume comes alive when focused on the life and times of Jackie Robinson.

An entire section, richly illustrated, is devoted to Robinson and his struggle to break baseball's racial barrier. He is seen, rightly I believe, as a forerunner of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s as important in his own way as some of the great figures of that struggle: Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, or even Martin Luther King. He became the best known and one of the most admired African-Americans in the United States. Twenty seven lines of the index are devoted to Robinson, more than any other figure in the volume except for Babe Ruth who garners 44. Given Robinson's significance, the proportion is about right. If you are interested, Ty Cobb gets 24 lines.

The Burns-Ward text breaks no new ground and anyone with a



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knowledge of baseball's history will learn little that is exciting. The Civil War series, by contrast, opened the eyes of many young Americans to the greatest catastrophe in our history. As a one volume history *Baseball* is inferior to existing works, of which Benjamin Rader's *Baseball: A History of America's Game*, 1992, remains the best. Rader manages to tell the same story with a richer grasp of the game in 250 fewer pages.

Even the illustrations, one of the key selling points of the book, are a let-down. Many have appeared before. There are a handful of wonderful images showing how deeply the game touched America's soul, but they hardly make the book worth \$60.

The text is plagued—that is the only word I can use—with sidebar comments by such non-baseball types as former Governor Mario Cuomo of New York, biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin and somebody named David Lamb. These add nothing to our understanding of the sport. George Will, the political columnist writing about baseball in the 1950s and Bill James, baseball's reigning statistic guru, do provide interesting insights, but even they could be done without.

The text is better than the television series if for no other reason than we do not have to put up with the inanities of Billy Crystal or the smug preciousness of Stephen Jay Gould. Instead of these people, why weren't some ex-ballplayers interviewed? They have fascinating stories to tell, and I'm sure the public would prefer them to

the often boring personal insights of celebrities from other fields.

Buck O'Neil, a great first baseman in the old Negro Leagues is featured in a long interview. On Public Television it was clear that Burns hoped that O'Neil would play the role occupied so effectively by Shelby Foote in the Civil War series. But while O'Neil has presence and a great expressive face his insights on the game of baseball were mostly pedestrian, certainly not up to Foote's gems about the horrors of Civil War.

O'Neil does sum up beautifully the plight of the great Negro Leaguers who came before Robinson and never got a chance to play in the major leagues. But he is not sentimental. "Waste no tears on me. I didn't come along too early. I was right on time."

Burns and Ward can't leave it at that. They go on incessantly about the injustice done to the tremendously talented African-American players. In fact, racial injustice is one of the major themes of the book. These injustices were tragic enough, but they are overwhelming in the authors' hands.

Their emphasis on this theme is somewhat unfair to the game of baseball. By 1960, 14.5% of the players in the majors were African-Americans including some of baseball's greatest stars: Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Ernie Banks, Roberto Clemente. This is close to the African-American percentage in the nation. What other branch of American society had integrated itself to that level by 1960?—certainly not the government, the universities,



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industry of even the churches. Baseball had a great deal to be ashamed of, but it could take pride in its role in this one area of our history.

Aside from its concentration on the treatment of racial issues in baseball, the authors have focused on the fortunes of two teams, the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Boston Red Sox. This choice explains some of the imbalance that follows. There is too much about the Dodgers and New York in general, important as these two franchises were for baseball's history after 1920. The emphasis on the Red Sox is less justifiable.

But this focus leads to such distortions as just six references to Stan Musial, arguably the greatest modern hitter in the NL, while Carl Yastrzemski gets nine citations. On a local point, Mike Schmidt, the greatest third baseman in the game, and Steve Carlton, the second winningest lefthander in baseball history, receive no mention in the text. In the meantime, mediocre players like Vida Blue, or Jim Gilliam or even Bernie Carbo of all people are mentioned in the text. If you know who Bernie Carbo is, you don't need this book.

There are other serious flaws in the coverage of baseball. *Baseball* contains little on television's impact, virtually nothing on the significance of the great broadcasters and their impact, as well as no analysis of the transformation of sports writing in shaping our view of baseball. In general, the analysis of the changes that swept over the game at different times

is pedestrian and passed over in favor of personalities.

Burns and Ward have done, at best, an adequate job of tracing baseball's role in American history. But overall they have failed to capture that indefinable quality that made the game so much a part of our lives. Too many axes to grind, too many bows in the direction of political correctness—there is even an obligatory section on the role of women in baseball—all of these take a toll on the author's work.

The PBS series is sure to be revived, especially as part of those interminable fund raisers, but I doubt it will have the impact or significance of the Civil War series. The great documentary on the game waits to be done.



JUDITH WERNER

## Every Eskimo is Someone's Aunt

When you are old like me and watch me fail,  
 as I have watched the women in my line,  
 do not believe the ethnic old wives' tale  
 of setting toothless Eskimos to sail  
 on ice floes with short rations, hook, and line.  
 When you are old like me, to watch me fail  
 won't be that easy (and the blubber of a whale  
 not found on every supermarket line).  
 Though you may find it hard to hear the tale,  
 my women clung to life and did not rail  
 against their dying, as in Dylan's line  
 When you are old and even mind has failed,  
 the will to live goes on within the pale  
 palsied body walking a nurse's line,  
 and love does not let go. Forget the tale  
 of ancient islanders on mountains, flail-  
 ing off the cliffs to spare their tribal line  
 starvation. You will love, and grieve, and fail,  
 as I have done, to heed such old wives' tales.



JUDITH WERNER

## Don't Worry, This Won't Be Graphic

Don't worry, this will not be graphic: breast  
mussed and just a little bloody near the rump  
(where cat had held its jaws a bit too tight)  
yet sturdy enough to stand, a bright-eyed lump  
snapping its beak at offerings of meat  
above my neat home-hollowed dry grass nest.

You know this, don't you? There are numerous  
baby robins, ears tuned to frantic call  
of parents from nearby maples, quick hearts  
pumping breast spots. How can one mourn them all?  
Past three shoebox burials one carts  
dead birds to the bin, a bit humorous

really, and writes them poems, or one tries,  
words crawling on the page, in metaphors  
of violence masked for the public taste  
by nonchalance, like ants on silky feathers  
following scent trails we drones have traced  
across the milky husks of unclosed eyes.

SHARON KOUROUS

## The Locked Door

Implicit in the blossom, the bud's long wait  
green below the bark, implicit in the mirror,  
the years of silence. Easy to forget  
during the slow drift of pollen, how failure  
is far more frequent; how ice can break  
even the supple bough; how roots can die  
easily and without protest, how glass can wait  
emptier than stars battered against the sky.

I wander through these foolish empty rooms  
sweeping echoes from the silent floor;  
wipe anger from the corners, take down the mirror.  
Implicit in the bud as in the bloom  
is season's end, the turned key and locked door:  
implicit in the falling leaf, the autumn fire.

An Afterword by  
JOHN KEENAN

## Nothing Gold Can Stay

The wonder is [it] hath endur'd so long.  
—*King Lear*, V, iii

The word came quietly. *Four Quarters* would not be included in the University budget next year. At the end of a 44-year history, it seems appropriate to remember stories accumulated over nearly half a century.

Half a century. It comes as a shock to realize that I have been around this magazine since its beginnings in the Fall of 1951. In those days I was a senior English major in college and the idea that some of my teachers were starting a literary magazine was as promising as uncorking a bottle of champagne. I dared to hope that someday I might have my work accepted there for publication.

The moving forces behind it included English professors Brother Patrick Sheekey, Claude Koch, Dan Rodden, Howard Hannum and John McGlynn. Only Claude Koch and Howard Hannum remain of the original group of Editorial Associates. Neither has any dramatic recollections to offer. They were young and talented teachers and they thought a magazine would be a good idea for a college that was just coming into its own with an enrollment made up of many ex-GI's. The beginning was quiet too, the most dramatic event being the College's willingness to support the idea. Somehow Brother Patrick must have persuaded the then-President, Brother Paul Sprissler, a scientist, that La Salle's faculty could and should have a literary magazine.

When the first issue appeared, it was a slim gray volume of 32 pages containing strong representation from the English Department, but the tradition of using outside contributors began with an excellent article by Walter Kerr, who had not yet attained the legendary status of having a theater named after him. Claude Koch's Catholic Press Association prize-winning story "Rest Camp" is there, along with Dan Rodden's witty roundup of Theater in Philadelphia. (Yes, Virginia, there *was* a lively theatrical tryout season in Philadelphia in those days. Dan reviewed *Paint Your Wagon*, *Top Banana*, and Maxwell Anderson's *Barefoot in Athens*, among others.)

In a somewhat solemn introductory note, as gray as the gray-on-gray cover, the Editors "offered their pages as a common ground for the creative, critical, or scholarly writer and the alert and reflective reader." They aimed "at focusing the practice and appreciation of writing in the Catholic tradition." In the first decade, the magazine was consciously, almost self-consciously, Catholic; probably because other literary magazines seldom concerned themselves with Catholic intellectuals; many thought of the term as an oxymoron. *Four Quarters* was determined to prove otherwise.

The first editor was not one of the founding faculty but another English professor named Austin App. He was named because he was senior to the others, the only Ph.D, and the only one in the young department who had published anything. Dr. App apparently conceived of his editorial function as providing his living room as a place for the Editorial Board to meet and discuss. He was a genial editor who supplied beer and pretzels for the young men and then went off to his study to do his own work. (Much of that work, we learned later, was pamphleteering denying the reality of the Holocaust, but Dr. App's obsessions are not a real part of this history.) "You fellas have a good time now," he said in his Milwaukee Lawrence Welk manner, and he disappeared into his bedroom-study, not to be seen again for the rest of the evening. He was nominal editor for only a year, the position then rotating among members of the Editorial Board annually.

What strikes me most as I look at that first volume is the number of writers who have been with us since the very beginning and the quality of their early work. Poet and fiction writer Claude Koch appeared in every issue; Joe Coogan (yes the same one as in this issue) made two appearances in 1952; and a young student named John Keenan published his first poem and his first essay in that volume. The poem was titled "Futile Effort," which one wag said described it perfectly. There was no student literary magazine in the '50s, and *Four Quarters* gave several student writers their first exposure in print. Some have done quite well. Jack McDevitt, for example, became a prize winning author of science fiction books, and John Langan has produced a series of highly successful textbooks on writing skills.

The decade of the '50's featured several symposiums. The first one now seems to have been positively prophetic: it was called *Trial by Television*. Faculty contributors continued to appear, but more established writers made appearances: historian Christopher Dawson, scholars Arthur Scouten and Morse Peckham, Peter Vierick, and Samuel Hynes.

A second symposium on "The Catholic College and the Catholic Writer" questioned why Catholic colleges were not producing more writers. Surprisingly, the symposium produced a list of responses right out of *Who's Who*. It included Evelyn Waugh, Allen Tate, J.F. Powers, John Dos Passos, Arthur Miller, Walter Kerr, Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley and William Carlos Williams.

Waugh was characteristically pithy: "I do not think your Catholic colleges are to blame for the paucity of writers. They do their best with the material sent them. It takes two or three generations of education to produce a man of culture."

This impressive list of contributors was generated by the hard work of a student assistant named Richard Coulson who sent out 200 letters to authors, critics, and scholars. One of those receiving such a letter was a resident of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington. You will notice, however, that Pound's name is not included in the list I just cited. Not because Pound did not reply. He did indeed, but his response was considered unprintable in the atmosphere of the 1950's. The letter has disappeared from the files; I suppose it went to the grave with Richard, who died young. But legend and my unimpeachable sources tell me that the letter began with Pound's questioning the sanity of the editors: "What kind of person would propose this question to a man in the

madhouse?" Pound then went on to describe such a person in vivid language that never made it into the pages of *Four Quarters*.

Another symposium in the last volume of the decade dealt with the Teaching of Creative Writing, a favorite topic of Brother Patrick Sheekey, who had just begun a long tenure as Editor. Brother Patrick was the driving force behind *Four Quarters* for much of the next 20 years. He loved fiction, loved writers, loved teaching. And he loved Flannery O'Connor's work from the time he read her first story. He knew nothing about her other than the fact that she was Catholic and she was a fine writer. He wrote to her inviting her response. The letter began, "Dear Mr. O'Connor."

But Flannery answered anyhow, and more than once referred to that symposium after she had made a reputation. In her collected works (*Library of America*), she uses it to lead off her essay on "The Church and the Fiction Writer."

When I first took over the editor's chair from Brother Patrick in 1970, I was curious: had we ever rejected someone who turned out to be a major writer? I found one. The author was a young woman from Windsor, Ontario, and Brother Patrick had scrawled a judgment on the sheet. "Not a story," he wrote, and returned the manuscript to Joyce Carol Oates.

I had occasion to tell this story to Joyce Carol Oates many years later—not without feeling a bit embarrassed. She had proved to be a very supportive and encouraging contributor to the first issues of the Second Series in the late '80's. To my relief, she enjoyed hearing about her rejection. "He was probably right," she laughed.

Brother Patrick Sheekey continued to edit the magazine throughout the turbulent '60s. Another Brother Pat came on board as Associate Editor: Brother Patrick Ellis, who was later to assume the presidency of La Salle and who presently heads the Catholic University of America. The names of the contributors were drawn from across the nation and the world: Walter Ong and Wilfred Sheed, T. Alan Broughton, Brendan Galvin, Albert Goldbarth and H.E. Francis, among many others who would later find recognition in the country's best magazines. There was Sam Hynes with an autobiographical piece that proved to be the genesis of his 1988 Book of the Month Club selection, *Flights of Passage: Reflections of a World War II Aviator*. And there was a story by Nancy A. J. Potter called "Sunday's Children" which ended up in one of that year's "Best" collections. *Four Quarters* was earning the respect of all parts of the American literary scene.

The College's centennial year (1963) was marked by the first Special Issue of this magazine. The issue was given over largely to articles about Katherine Anne Porter, who had visited the campus on several occasions and made many friends. The article contained contributions from John V. Hagopian, R. W. Stallman, Robert Heilman, J.F. Powers, and Joseph Weisenfarth, then a La Salle faculty member, now at the University of Wisconsin. It has become a collector's item. The success of this issue prompted another special issue in 1967 on Thornton Wilder. By that time I had become an Associate Editor of the magazine, and I came up with the idea of the Wilder issue so that Brother Patrick would let me be more than a proofreader.

In 1970, Brother Patrick became ill, and a young colleague of mine named J.D. McClatchy talked me into taking the job of keeping the magazine going.

"I'll help you as much as I can," he said. "It'll be fun." To me it sounded a little like an Andy Hardy movie of the '40s: "Come on gang, we could put on a show!" Sandy McClatchy was a Talent—a gifted poet, skilled short story writer, and perceptive critic. I am happy to see that he has received his punishment for luring me into years of indentured servitude by becoming an editor of a literary magazine himself. Sandy was chosen to bring the *Yale Review* back to life a few years ago, a task he has accomplished nicely while at the same time solidifying his reputation as one of our finer poets.

We were determined to show what we could do, and I look back on our first issue with the fondness associated with a first born. We had a solid batting order of poets consisting of Thomas Kinsella, William Heyen, T. Alan Broughton, Sister Maura, and Richmond Lattimore, and we published for the first time the work of a kid poet named Joseph Meredith. (His book is reviewed in this issue.)

The real blockbuster of the issue came from one of our own. McClatchy contributed a brilliant story called "Allonym" which was to earn an O. Henry Award. The new *Four Quarters* was launched, and so was the career of J.D. McClatchy.

As I look back over these years, it seems to me that we published an impressive array of writers who have since become influential teachers of creative writing. I'm sure I don't know all of them, but I do recognize the names of people like George Garrett, Pamela Painter, John L'Heureux, Philip O'Connor, T. Alan Broughton, and Michael Koch. (Michael, incidentally, formed half of a father and son tandem of contributors with his dad, Claude. He now teaches at Cornell and edits *Epoch*.)

Serendipity stepped in, and the result was the largest issue we ever produced: the Robert Penn Warren issue of May, 1972. Here is how that came about. My friend and colleague, Jack Seydow, told me of a student of his who had wangled an interview with her idol, Robert Penn Warren. Was I interested? Was I! I decided to make the interview by Ruth Fisher the centerpiece of a special RPW issue. I solicited contributions from some of the best Warren scholars (including Victor Strandberg, Frank Cayton, Earl Wilcox, and Allen Shepherd) and some artistic contributions from those who knew and loved the man (including John Hollander, Cleanth Brooks, Arthur Scouten, Judith Kroll, and Mark Strand) The cover was given over entirely to an original drawing of Willie Stark as seen in the imagination of painter Jim Hanes. Sections of that issue, especially the interview, have been reprinted in studies of Warren over the years. It would be an understatement to say the work turned out to be worthwhile. I say this despite my memory of my all-time proofreading goof: in a headline entitled "Dream and Reality in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*," some gremlin changed *Reality* to *Realty*. I have never heard from the author of that article again.

One of the things I treasure from the experience was my opportunity to get to know Mr. Warren through correspondence and in person. He was one of the most generous authors I have ever known, a man of unfailing politeness, rigorous standards, and complete absence of egotism. At this time I like to read again his words to me in a letter of July, 1981:

It is fine to have the copy of *Four Quarters*, and I am reading it with pleasure. I imagine that you share some of the feeling I had when the SR (*Southern Review*) died. I wouldn't have missed doing it, but I'd never do it again. That kind of *editing is definitely a young man's job*, I think, and you did a damn distinguished job of it. (*Italics mine.*)

More serendipity. When we started giving the cover over to James Hanes' wonderful sketches, I had to move the Table of Contents to Page 1. And I wanted the first story or article to start on the right hand page. So I fashioned a few editorial comments under the title of *Marginalia* to fill up page 2. Somehow these grew into full-fledged essays, and *Marginalia* became a feature of each issue. People seemed to like these pieces, and, having failed as poet and short story writer, I began to think of myself as an essayist. But then I read E. B. White and Joseph Epstein again and discovered that I was just a panicky editor who wrote in fear and trembling under the threat of a printer's deadline.

Aided by McClatchy's status as a Contributing Editor of *American Poetry Review*, we managed to publish a poem by W. H. Auden in 1973 called "Aubade." It took some doing. I was warned that Auden never responded to letters so I sent him a check and said that he need not answer by letter; his acceptance of the check would indicate that he was offering the poem to us for publication, the same poem he had originally sent to *APR*, whose editors had decided against it. For weeks I haunted the College Business Office, looking for a signed check from Auden. And then it was there. We used the poem with pride. The story, however, refused to end. Many months later I happened upon a poem by Auden in the *Atlantic Monthly*. It too was titled "Aubade." And in fact it was our "Aubade" with a few minor changes. Should we sue the *Atlantic* for violation of copyright? An Auden scholar and friend assured us that the old boy had simply forgotten, and so should we. So we forgot about suing but held on to the story of the Auden Caper for future retelling.

Many of our regular contributors continued to appear during these years and, of course, we added some fine new regulars. Among them were fiction writers like Mary Clearman, Eugene K. Garber, Jon Hassler, Charles Oliver, Ann Jones, Lester Goldberg, and Michael Koch. We lured some articles from old friend John Lukacs and from colleagues Barbara Millard and Caryn Musil among others. Sadly, former editor Dan Rodden made his last appearance, but we continued to receive regular contributions of poetry and fiction from former editor Claude Koch. Poets like Kelly Cherry and John Ditsky joined the company of long-time contributors Daniel Burke, Joe Meredith, Charles Edward Eaton, and Larry Rubin. On the editorial side, J.D. McClatchy had departed but James Butler replaced him as an invaluable asset.

Jim Butler became Acting Editor in 1977-78 when I was on leave and promptly published a story called "Shy Bearers" by Lester Goldberg that made the 1979 *O. Henry Prize Stories* collection. I called it beginner's luck.

When I returned from my leave I became Department Chair and nominated John Christopher Kleis to replace me in the Editor's spot. For me, the greatest editorial achievement of John's tour was his publication of a Special Issue in

1983 devoted to the work of Claude Koch, La Salle's creative writing teacher and one of *Four Quarters'* most prolific contributors since 1951. It was a monumental effort.

The magazine fell on some hard times economically, and its publication was suspended in 1985. With strong support from the faculty, it was revived after a one-year hiatus and I found myself back on the job. The first issue of the Second Series appeared in 1987. It was a larger book, 64 pages in length and 7x10 in size, and the publication schedule was changed to twice a year, despite the name promising a quarterly. The content extended beyond the literary field into many facets of contemporary culture, and we added regular departments and book reviews. It appeared substantial, and I like to think we were able to raise our standards a bit. We certainly raised the pay offered authors. Before 1970, we had paid only in copies. I believed strongly that authors ought to receive an honorarium; my recollection is that it was quite small, but when the new *Four Quarters* made its debut we raised the honorarium to a level comparable to the most respected magazines in our class.

Whether it was the pay or the quality appearance of the book, we were able to attract many well-regarded authors and some first-rate work from many others we had never heard of but who had heard of us. The first issue included a nice mix of La Salle faculty and others, such as Joyce Carol Oates, Alfred Corn, Alan Paton, James Merrill, J.W. Fulbright, J.D. McClatchy, John Lukacs, Daniel Burke, and William Van Wert.

For our covers we drew upon the extraordinary collection in the La Salle Art Museum, and later on the exceptional talents of alumnus David McShane, now a student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. English professor Patricia Boyle Haberstroh drew on her connections with Irish poets and we put out a Special Irish issue in 1989. I was shameless enough to call upon Seamus Heaney for a contribution, citing the fact that my father was from his home town in Ireland and my cousins still lived there. He responded generously with an essay on Yeats and a warm letter telling me how "he used to ride their gray pony into town."

I will miss those notes from authors I have never met but count as friends. I remember so many of them: William Stafford, sending us what I believe were the last poems he ever published; X.J. Kennedy, inviting me to stop in for a beer if I drove near Boston; John Lukacs, an old friend who was always supportive; Sam Hynes, who never forgot that his book started with publication in our pages. I will miss the pleasure and plain fun of working with Jack Rossi and Joanne Cawley in the office. I confess that I won't miss computer glitches, proofreading lapses, and hurried decisions at deadline.

Mostly the memories are good ones, some even precious ones, but Robert Penn Warren's words describe my own feelings now: *I wouldn't have missed doing it, but I'd never do it again. That kind of editing is definitely a young man's job.* I do hope some young man or woman gets the opportunity to continue the reputation of *Four Quarters* at some future date.







## Contributors

WENDY BARKER is a professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, and *Nimrod*, among other journals. She has written several books, including *Let the Ice Speak* (Ithaca House Books, Greenfield Review Press, 1991). Her third book manuscript, *Of Singing*, is circulating, and she is currently working on a fourth.

JOSEPH COOGAN, a retired medical writer, appeared in the second issue of *Four Quarters* in 1952 and several recent issues. He is now a free lance writer.

JUSTIN CRONIN is Writer-in-Residence and Assistant Professor of English at La Salle. He is the author of the National Novella Award winning novel *A Short History of the Long Ball* (Council Oak Books, 1990).

E. B. de VITO has been writing since early childhood. Her work has appeared in such publications as *American Scholar*, *New Yorker*, and the *New York Times*. Recently, Aegina Press published her first book, *Poems on Many Levels*.

SISTER ANN MAUREEN GALLAGHER, IHM, a poet and writer, lives and works in the Philadelphia area. She is a Ph. D. candidate in English at Temple University where she also teaches part time. She is the author of a collection of poems, *A Time for Figs* (1992).

TERRY GRANT lives in Chattanooga with his wife and children. He has previously appeared in *Four Quarters* and *Aetholon: The Journal of Sport Literature*.

JoANNE GROWNEY is a professor of mathematics and computer science at Bloomsburg University. Several of her poems have appeared recently in mathematics journals. Her collection, *Intersections*, published in 1993, contains both mathematical and non-mathematical verse.

PAMELA STEED HILL earned her Master's degree in English from Marshall University. She currently works as a proofreader for an accounting firm in Minneapolis. Her poems have appeared in approximately fifty-five journals, including *The Antioch Review*, *Epoch*, and *Chicago Review*.

JOHN J. KEENAN is Professor of English at La Salle University and the Editor of *Four Quarters*.

THOMAS E. KENNEDY's books include a novel (*Crossing Borders*, Watermark, 1990) and four volumes of literary criticism (most recently on Robert Coover, Macmillan, 1992). Two further books are forthcoming in 1995: the collection *Unreal Cities* (Wordcraft of Oregon) and the novel *A Weather of the Eye* (Potpourri). His works have also been featured in the *O Henry Prize Stories* (1994) and *Pushcart Prize* (1990).

SHARON KOUROUS is a high school teacher who began sending out her poetry six years ago. "The Locked Door" is acceptance number 89. She has published poetry in *The Lyric*, *Poetpourri*, *Poet*, and *The Piedmont Review* among others.



## Contributors

RICHARD LUFTIG is a professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio. His poems and literary works have appeared or will appear in *Aura Literary Arts Review*, *Emrys*, *Parnassus Review*, and *Poetalk*.

SUSAN A. MANCHESTER currently resides in Toronto with her husband. She teaches English and has led several poetry workshops in Oneida, New York.

PETER MUNRO lives in Seattle, and his poems have been published in several journals.

KATHARINE PRIVETT lives in Pawnee, Oklahoma. Her poem "Turtle" was published in an earlier edition of *Four Quarters*. Her work has also appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Widener Review*, and *Pembroke Magazine*. Her latest book, *A Time of Weavers*, was published by Poetry Around Press.

KEVIN PRUFER's poetry has recently been published in *Literary Review*, the *Cimarron Review*, and *Cumberland Poetry Review*. His book-length manuscript, *Strange Wood*, was awarded an Academy of American Poets Prize and is in search of a publisher.

NANCY RIGGAN, primarily a poet, has also written essays, opinion pieces, and short stories. Her work has been published in *Black Buzzard Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, and *Aim*. Nancy and her husband Richard have four adult children and eleven grandchildren.

JOHN ROONEY is Director of the Graduate Program in Human Services Psychology at La Salle. He has frequently contributed to *Four Quarters*.

JOHN P. ROSSI is a Professor of History at La Salle University and the Associate Editor of *Four Quarters*. He teaches a course in the History of Baseball and is currently completing a book on Baseball since World War II..

MATTHEW J. SPIRENG is the assistant city editor for the Kingston (NY) *Daily Freeman*. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in such publications as *The American Scholar*, *Poet & Critic*, and *Yankee*. He won first prize in the 1993 *Blue Unicorn* poetry contest.

WILLIAM VAN WERT teaches film and creative writing at Temple University. He was the 1994 winner of the AWP competition in creative non-fiction, which will result in a book called *Memory Links*, to be published by the University of Georgia Press. He also has three novels forthcoming.

JUDITH WERNER, who lives in the Bronx, New York, has published poems recently in *The Lyric*, *South Dakota Review*, and *River Oak Review*. She is one of the poets in *Sixteen Voices*, an anthology from Mariposa Printing and Publishing, and has work upcoming in *Elf* and *Yankee Magazine*.

PAULA JANE WHITE, a La Salle graduate, teaches at the University of Delaware, where she has recently earned her doctorate in English. Her previous publications include work in film, drama, and cultural studies.





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